

THE MAINSTREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS:
JAMES JOYCE, VIRGINIA WOOLF, WILLIAM FAULKNER
AND MASS MODERNISM

BY

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For Emily, who is always in my consciousness.

ABSTRACT

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Department of English, December 2010

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The Mainstream of Consciousness: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and Mass Modernism argues that the “stream of consciousness” method which has become synonymous with “high” modernism was, in actuality, a widely accepted and employed trope within interwar popular culture. Instead of considering the ways writers like Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner resisted consumer culture, this project argues that their work both informed and was informed by advertising and best-selling fiction.

This project establishes that the modernist “stream of consciousness” method was a “popular” form that was prevalent and widely embraced by the interwar public, that the method appealed to a large audience because it invited identification with a variety of subjective perspectives (or “consciousnesses”) which correlate with what film critics have called the “system of suture,” and that its dramatization of the instability of the split self (between the “preverbal” or “subconscious” and consciousness) helped create the interwar psychological subject. Each chapter works to historicize the emergence of the “stream of consciousness” as a method and, with Julia Kristeva’s conceptualization of the semiotic, to theorize the way these texts informed interwar subjectivity as a dialectic between the rational and communicative and the irrational or “prespeech” level of the “subconscious.”

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Preface

According to Frederick R. Karl, the stream of consciousness “is the epitome of Modernism” (239). As the stylistic method of Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner, the “stream of consciousness” has become synonymous with textual “difficulty,” with a “high” modernism separate from mass or popular culture. The purpose of this study is not merely to contribute to the ongoing reconsideration of literary modernism as socially relevant and interested in consumer culture, but to take, as a point of focus, the “epitome” of modernism—the “stream of consciousness” or the textual representation of interiority—and chart its appearance in and widespread acceptance by the interwar public.

When I began this study, I intended to read the bestsellers of the 1920s and 1930s (labeled “middlebrow moderns” by critics Lisa Botshon and Meredith Goldsmith) against the fiction of Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner in order to deconstruct the categories of the “modern” novel. With the presumption that “modernism” could be read as a period, not a category, in the same way we speak of Victorian fiction, I started working my way through Alice Payne Hackett’s top-ten lists in her *Seventy Years of Best Sellers* and expected to find the conventional, plot-driven, “realist” narratives that decades of postmodern criticism has established as the “other” to the stylistic experimentalism of literary

modernism. Instead, I discovered passages—some brief, some sustained—of the “stream of consciousness” in much of the “popular” fiction I read. From there, my research led me to reviews and periodical literature, where I discovered the “stream of consciousness” in shorter fiction, fragments, and parodies. Perhaps most surprising, I found examples of the “epitome of Modernism” in advertising handbooks and in actual advertising copy. My first impulse, since I had been informed by Adorno and the Frankfurt School’s argument that modernism served as a form of critique against the “culture industry,” was to assume I had encountered a few anomalies. When I began encountering more “anomalies,” I realized that modernist techniques were present at all levels of textual production, and the only way the “great divide” argument could be maintained was if mass-mediated texts were ignored—which is indeed what the specious “divide” argument has depended upon to last as long as it has.

The argument advanced here is based on three premises: first, that the modernist stream of consciousness method (or “trope” as I suggest it be called) was a “popular” form that was prevalent and widely embraced by the interwar public; second, that the method appealed to a large audience because it invited identification with a variety of subjective perspectives (or “consciousnesses”) which correlate with what film critics have called the “system of suture”; and third, that its dramatization of the instability of the split self (between the “preverbal” or “subconscious” and consciousness) helped create the interwar psychological subject.

In the chapters that follow, I address the historical context as well as the content of the stream of consciousness as it appears in a variety of texts—from a Gillette advertisement to Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. I have avoided the move to establish the stream of consciousness as simply a form of “interior monologue” traceable throughout literary history in an effort to contain and periodize a style of writing interwar readers recognized as “modern”; while it may have served Joyce’s publishers to establish *Ulysses* as part of the “classical” or Homeric tradition and rescue it from its charges of novelty and obscenity, there is no longer much need to legitimize Joyce, but there is still a need to better understand why his method became as accepted (and adapted) as it did.

In chapter one, “The Stream of Consciousness as Mass Modernism,” I discuss the way advertising textbooks—and advertisements—tried to appeal to the interwar consumer by understanding the “stream” of thought. I trace the widespread appeal of the trope by examining its appearance in widely-circulated newspapers and magazines, as well as in best-selling fiction by writers like J. P. McEvoy and Fannie Hurst. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of Eugene O’Neill’s sensational stream-of-consciousness play, *Strange Interlude*.

In chapter two, “Joyce’s *Ulysses* as Self-Help,” I focus primarily on the reception of the novel and the way contemporary readers responded to Joyce’s method. Borrowing the notion of “suture” from film studies, I suggest that readers felt forced into accepting subject-positions within *Ulysses* and that the

novel dramatizes (and asks readers to participate) in the experience of split subjectivity.

In chapter three, “Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and Sutured Consciousness,” I consider the way Woolf’s readers also approached her texts as “cinematic” and apply the concept of “suture” to a close reading of her novel. Like *Ulysses*, *Mrs. Dalloway* presents the modernist rational/irrational dialectic through specific consciousnesses and sutures the reader into entertaining multiple, sometimes radical, subject-positions. Drawing upon Woolf’s letters, diaries, and essays, as well as reviews from her friends and critics, I contextualize her understanding of the “stream of consciousness” (a term she didn’t ascribe to her own work) and the way it was received.

Finally, in chapter four, “Addie’s Coffin and the Narrative I/Eyecon: Faulkner’s Typographic Semiotics,” I consider *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury* as late examples of the stream of consciousness, less for the way they were received (since readers were becoming familiar with the method) than for the way they challenge the very notion of language and subjectivity. Each of the chapters are informed by the semiotic theories of Julia Kristeva and consider the ways the rational or “symbolic” order of communication and convention are challenged by the “semiotic” or “preverbal” stream of consciousness.

Implicit throughout this study is the contention that consciousness is the product of culture and ideology. When interwar readers were asked to enter into different consciousnesses, they were interpellated into a subject-position: one divided between rationality and communication and the irrational

"subconscious," and in this act of identification, they learned to become a "split" psychological subject.

One

Introduction: The Stream of Consciousness and Mass Modernism

“. . . she has strange devious intuitions that tap the hidden currents of life . . .
dark intermingling currents that become the one stream of desire . . . ”

— Marsden, *Strange Interlude* (193; act 6)

In 1931, memoirist and decorator Muriel Draper ventured from New York to begin a lecture tour of the American Midwest. In her article for *Harper's* magazine, “Standing and Talking,” she reports, with no little astonishment, that the audiences she spoke to

are perplexed by problems in decoration and want to know if it is really wrong to put blue in a north room if blue is their favorite color [. . .]. Are Boston ferns legitimate in a room with a “moderne” (horrid word!) note in it, or must it be cactus? Does stream of consciousness in literature mean you tell all, and if so—well . . . ? Is Gertrude Stein prose or poetry and how many times must one read her before giving up? Is Virginia Woolf as great a novelist as Jane Austen, and if you have never read Norman Douglas, what book had you better begin with? Was Marcel Proust influenced by James Joyce, and if you want to write, should you take a course in writing or just write? (199-200)

Draper follows her illustration of midwestern philistines with a confession: “they do not ask these questions idly. They want answers, and answers that mean something to them. It is part of their life” (200). What is suggestive about this anecdote is not just that modernism is revealed as anything but an exclusive, “highbrow” concern (Draper says the enthusiastic reactions she encountered were representative or “collective” [200]), but also that, any anxiety its supposed impenetrability elicited was secondary to the anxiety the reading public felt about being perceived as unfashionable, of not being “moderne.” Of particular note is the inquiry into the “stream of consciousness”—one of the defining stylistic indexes of “high” modernism—which here seems to offer at once a sense of culture and the pleasure of salacious disclosures. Without making too much of Draper’s portrait of middle-American intellectual curiosity, it does offer a glimpse of the reading public’s interest in the development of literary modernism that has passed without enough acknowledgment—even by the more recent reappraisals of the interrelationship between modernism and the mass market.

The movement to consider modernism from the perspective of cultural studies, to reconsider, as Rita Felski urges, “more expansive maps of the modern that can locate texts squarely in the political fault lines and fissures of culture” (502), has done much to discredit any historical evidence for Andreas Huyssen’s assumption that there was ever a “great divide” between modernist “high art” which opposed itself to “mass culture and the culture of everyday life” (47)—an assumption that perhaps followed naturally from decades of New

Criticism, which presented modernist texts as disinterested, universal, and ahistorical (an argument suited for the practice of New Criticism, but not for a consideration of the modernist movement) which has been sustained (if from a Marxist perspective) by Fredric Jameson, who believes that in the modern period, “culture withdrew from [the] real world into an autonomous space of art” (“Culture and Finance Capital” 273). Even Lawrence Rainey, in his *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*, who admits that “modernism’s interchanges with the emerging world of consumerism, fashion, and display were far more complicated and ambiguous than often assumed” (7) essentially reinforces the “great divide” argument with some equivocation. Modernism, he argues, “did indeed entail a certain retreat from the domain of public culture, but one that also continued to overlap and intersect with the public realm in a variety of contradictory ways” and that modernism

is a strategy whereby the work of art invites or solicits its commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes a commodity of a special sort, one that is temporarily exempted from the exigencies of immediate consumption prevalent within the larger cultural economy, and instead is integrated into a different economic circuit of patronage, collecting, speculation, and investment. (3)

For Rainey, modernism was part of consumer culture, but only insofar as it represented a niche market for the culturally elite. As he writes in his essay, “The Cultural Economy of Modernism,” “literary modernism constitutes a

strange and perhaps unprecedented withdrawal from the public sphere of cultural production and debate, a retreat into a divided world of patronage, investment, and collecting” (61). While there is no doubt that there is a market for rare and first editions of modern literature (as there is for rare and first editions from all periods of literary history), it must also be noted that modernists like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner (not to mention Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and Willa Cather) wrote best sellers that became so because they clearly appealed to interwar consumers. To codify the entirety of “literary modernism” as estranged from the “public sphere” is to dismiss the way modernist literary techniques—like the stream of consciousness—emerged in mass-marketed fiction, magazines, and even advertisements. The only way to support the claim that modernism was a “withdrawal from the public sphere” is to ignore the reality of the interwar reading public.

Richer, more inclusive and historically situated approaches to modernism and consumer culture are presented by Catherine Turner, Michael North, and Karen Leick. In her *Marketing Modernisms Between the World Wars*, Turner includes several advertisements for modernist literature like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, and Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, and discusses the way publishers presented their modern authors to the public. Turner is willing to see the interrelationship between modernism and the marketplace, but she is careful to preserve the idea that the relationship was uneasy: “without embracing consumer culture whole-heartedly, the

modernists saw that they had much to gain by reaching a détente with commerce,” she writes; “their art remained sacred products of their own inspiration, but they also saw that if they really wanted to ‘make it new,’—in the broad sense of changing human perception and experience in the world—they would have to reach an audience” (4). According to Turner, modernism “intergrat[ed] a fascination with and opposition to mass culture” (7).

Michael North, in his remarkable *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*, addresses film, fashion, radio, and the emergence of public relations in order to establish an historical context for the production and reception of modern literature. As he points out, modernist writers not only referenced and incorporated aspects of popular culture in their work, but that these writers, too, were consumers who “lived in the same world of film, music, advertising, and promotion that is still around us, and that, like most denizens of the twentieth century, they had various and not entirely negative reactions to it” (29). North convincingly argues that to maintain the pretense of a modernism adversarial to its historical moment effectively works to decontextualize it and render it even more difficult and less accessible to readers at present. He notes, “In their own context, when the contemporary materials, at least, did not require so much explanation, the works of Eliot and Joyce were likely to strike conservative readers as ugly and scandalous in much the same way that contemporary music did” (211). North notes that by deracinating modernism from its historical context, it becomes easier to repudiate it as elitist and

exclusionary, as the reactionary precursor to a more culturally engaged postmodernism:

Since postmodernism defined itself in large part by its greater eclecticism and stylistic openness, it required as a foil a modernism as exclusive as possible. Thus, the rivalry between postmodernism and modernism was read back into history, quite openly, as an antipathy between modernism and mass culture, one whose existence has always seemed more a matter of theoretical necessity than empirical fact. (10)

North goes on, in his book, to present a series of “empirical facts”—a memoir by Charlie Chaplin, fashion and phonograph advertisements, former *Dial* editor Gilbert Seldes’ promotion of popular culture in *The Seven Lively Arts* (to name a few examples)—to substantiate the interrelationship between modernism and consumer culture and to contextualize 1922, the date of the publication of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*.

Karen Leick, in her recent *PMLA* article, “Popular Modernism: Little Magazines and the American Daily Press,” makes an important contribution to modernist historicism with her assertion that modernism was much more publicized and disseminated to the reading public than has been presumed. “Mainstream readers had not only heard of” the modernist movement, “they were familiar with many of the writers who were published there. In fact,” she claims, “it would have been difficult for any literate American to remain unaware of modernists like Joyce and Stein in the 1920s since their publications in little

magazines were discussed so frequently in daily newspapers and in popular magazines" (126). Thanks to magazines like *Vanity Fair*, under the editorial leadership of Edmund Wilson, Leick points out, a substantial audience was introduced to modernist writers like Aldous Huxley (who had a semi-regular column), T. S. Eliot, Stein and Joyce, to name a few. Her research into the way the popular press received modernism dispels any illusion of a modernist "high" culture removed from the public and "reveals that there was an increasingly intimate exchange between literary modernism and mainstream culture in this period" (126). Furthermore, Leick writes,

An individual did not need to go to college, cultivate highbrow friendships in literary circles, or otherwise go out of the way to understand the debates about modernist writing in this period.

One simply needed to subscribe to a newspaper and one or more periodicals, as virtually all Americans did. (132)

Leick's argument is not only illuminating in its assertion that modernist experimental writing was part of the public sphere, the "cultural scene" of the interwar years, but also because it calls into question the notion that the reading public was divided between those who consumed "highbrow" (or modernist) and "middlebrow" ("best selling") fiction. That the latter has been ignored by scholarship until recently because, as Nicola Humble writes, "it was largely written and consumed by women" (2) and, as Lisa Botshon and Meredith Goldsmith explain in the introduction to their collection, *Middlebrow Moderns: Popular Women Writers of the 1920s*, the popular, "feminine" (labeled such

because it describes the writers, readers, and marginalization of these texts) middlebrow authors “negotiated a delicate balance of commercial success and (albeit grudging) critical respect. Neither ‘high’ literary producers not ‘low’ dime-novel creators [. . .] they made best-seller lists and bridged gaps in an audience increasingly fragmented by economic, racial, ethnic, and regional differences” (6). Finally, Janice Radway argues that “middlebrow culture”—made up of readers of the “middlebrow” fiction popularized by the Book-of-the-Month Club,—“constituted itself implicitly, and sometimes quite explicitly, in opposition to both emerging literary modernism and the avant-garde and to the growth of an institutionalized, more thoroughly professionalized group of literary specialists, some employed by highbrow magazines, others in the fast-developing university English departments” (15).

As valuable as these studies are in widening the realm of modernist studies to include neglected authors and texts, the drive to stratify fiction (or readers) into “high,” “middle,” and “low” taste groups is a way to effectively uphold and perpetuate the “great divide” myth while seemingly offering a culturally attuned and historicized re-estimation of the modern period. There is no doubt that writers like Fannie Hurst, Anita Loos, and Edna Ferber have been (until recently) unfairly excluded from academic discussion of the interwar years; but to reclaim them as conservative “middlebrow” writers at odds with “highbrow” “experimental” fiction is to ignore their own innovations in narrative technique and to exclude them from their rightful place in the development of literary modernism.

In fact, literary modernism not only developed alongside and became (as Leick puts it) “increasingly intimate” with “middlebrow” mass culture: it *was* mass culture. To argue that modernism was inseparable from mass culture is not just to point out that innovative fiction by authors like Joyce, Stein, Woolf, and Faulkner was heavily promoted in the popular press and made widely available (and affordable) to the public by publishing houses like Boni & Liveright and the Modern Library (though it certainly was); it is also to acknowledge the way modernist techniques and concerns appeared in and appealed to consumer culture—to what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer call the “culture industry” of the mass media.

Rather than generalize about “modernism” as if it were a monolithic movement with shared aesthetic assumptions, the focus here will be on a specific aspect of what has been regarded as a signifier of modernist writing: the “stream of consciousness” style. To concentrate on this stylistic technique for presenting subjective, unspoken ideas, impressions and sensations (or what Robert Humphrey handily calls the “prespeech level” of consciousness [3]) as it was developed by writers like Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf is a way to localize and identify moments of mass/modernist dialogism. The “stream of consciousness” style or trope (as it will be referred to here in order to describe its syntagmatic features and to suggest it was a “fashionable” kind of writing that was employed for rhetorical effect), as Muriel Draper’s anecdote indicates, was a topic of interest and discussion for the reading public; it was not considered a narrative “technique” exclusive to “literary” fiction: it

was defined and described in advertising manuals and in the most popular self-help and self-education books of the interwar period; it appeared in advertisements, in the movies, and in bestselling fiction. The public fascination with the “stream of consciousness” was part of the widespread interest in psychology—particularly the psychology of self-control.

The Main “Stream”: Advertising the Stream of Consciousness

“The mind is a stream,” Harry Dexter Kitson explains in the opening chapter of his 1921 monograph. The stream, he continues, consists “of the sum-total of mental processes going on within the individual: ideas, sensations, feelings, volitions and actions,” and his “task” in this book is “to describe this stream; to slow it up and examine its contents” (4). One might assume to find such a definition of the “stream of consciousness” in a book about Jamesian philosophy or in a psychology text—perhaps even an early discussion of emerging narrative forms—but Kitson’s purpose in *The Mind of the Buyer: A Psychology of Selling* is to inform advertisers how to appeal to the consumer’s “mental stream” to increase sales. He writes:

The mind never stands still. It is in constant motion. The thoughts of one moment are quickly replaced by others. The mind of the buyer in a sale consists of a procession of sensations,

feelings, and willings. From the beginning to the conclusion of the sale these flow along like a stream. (Kitson 4)

The benefit of understanding the “buyer’s” mind as complex and associative is that the seller can appeal to specific stages of the buyer’s mental process (“attention,” “interest,” “desire,” “confidence,” “decision and action,” to “satisfaction” [Kitson 5]). To get the buyer’s attention, for example, the seller needs to find a way to make an advertisement enter the consumer’s consciousness:

He must thrust it, as it were, completely into the middle of the stream. Only thus can he secure for it a high degree of attention. The ease with which the seller may do this depends partly upon the rate of flow of the stream and partly upon the contents of it. Sometime the current flows sluggishly, as when the buyer sits without occupation in a street-car and casts his eyes carelessly from one advertising card to another. On such occasions it is easy for the seller to enter the stream. (Kitson 30)

The ultimate goal of entering the buyer’s consciousness is to “inject an idea “ to promote the “desired response”—creating an association with the advertised product which will lead to a sale: “the task of the seller is to encourage those ideas which are favorable to his pet-idea and to suppress those which are contrary to it” (Kitson 156). To this end, the seller must hold the buyer’s attention, not “merely [to] endeavor to keep out of his mind any distracting ideas; but [to] go further and divert his attention from even his own mental

processes"; above all, Kitson stresses, "keep him from being introspective. He should be oblivious to the fact that he is being suggested to" (157). The "stream," as Kitson presents it, is not an inchoate murmur of impulsive drives; it is the locus of consumer desire and can be directed and exploited by channeling the buyer's thoughts away from self-reflexivity and towards the objective product.

Kitson's book is not unique in its focus on the stream of consciousness of the consumer. John H. Cover's *Advertising: Its Problems and Methods* (1926) includes the following passage on "The Mind in Operation" (and also employs the conceit of the inattentive passenger in a street car):

our minds are constantly active, are never at rest. Sensations from the outside world, if only of a cold draft or a hot breeze, are crowding upon us: ideas, feelings, and emotions seem to be striving to direct our will and energy elsewhere [. . .]. Let us recall our state of mind in [a] street-car. We are probably intent at first upon the most effective way to reach our destination [. . .]. [perhaps] we have noticed some of our fellow passengers and have begun an analysis of their features and other interesting facts. Possibly we have unconsciously become attentive to certain individuals and we suddenly realize that we have been staring. Quickly turning away, our attention is attracted by another object and perhaps this is an advertisement. If there are two dozen cards in the car, what were the qualities in this

particular advertisement which forced itself upon our consciousness? (86)

To gain the buyer's attention, of course, the advertiser "must switch the reader's consciousness from the thought track his mind has been following to the route of our particular appeal [. . .] we must break in upon his consciousness quickly and strongly—almost with a jolt" (86). Again, the goal is to redirect consciousness away from random contemplative interiority towards a specific, public market signifier.

Similarly, Walter Dill Scott, in his *The Psychology of Advertising in Theory and Practice* (1921), emphasizes the importance of understanding and appealing to the associative mind of the consumer. It is indicative of the cultural "inward turn" that Scott urges, "at the present time [. . .] the successful advertiser *must* study psychology and that he *must* do it at once" (5). Scott's focus is the (free) associative mind and how to guide it towards habitual response to brands and products. In his illustration of how "mental images" are based on associations, he presents a series of stream of consciousness descriptions, written by his psychology students, of the impressions words like "breakfast table" and "railroad train" call forth in order to highlight the importance of understanding and describing "mental imagery" for "the young man who expects to make a profession of writing advertisements" (84):

When the word [*sic*] 'railroad train' was given, I saw the train very plainly just stopping in front of the depot. I saw the people getting on the train; these people were very indistinct. It is their

motions rather than the people themselves which I see. I can feel myself getting on the train, finding a seat, and sitting down. I cannot hear the noises of the train, but can hear rather indistinctly the conductor calling the stations. I believe my mental imagery is more *motile* (of movement) than anything else. Although I can see some things quite plainly, I seem to feel movements most distinctly. (Scott 63)

According to Scott, the purpose of advertisements are to set the stream of consciousness of the buyer in motion toward the purchase of the product. "Advertisements are sometimes spoken of as the nervous system of the business world," he explains; and "as our nervous system is arranged to give us all the possible sensations from every object, so the advertisement which is comparable to the nervous system must awaken in the reader as many different kinds of images as the object itself can excite" (84), so that the advertisement produces a kind of synesthetic response in the consumer. For the purpose of reading the idea of the mental "stream" as it was understood by advertising theorists against the "stream of consciousness" as it was conceptualized by contemporaneous novelists, a final example from Scott's text about the workings of the associative mind will serve. "As I walk down a busy street," Scott begins, "unless I am oblivious to my surroundings my thought is determined for me by the objects which surround me. My eye is caught by an artistically decorated window in which sporting goods are displayed. My mind is fully occupied for the time with the perception of these articles" (87). For

Scott, the objective correlative of a product is past associations with similar products: "It happens," he writes, "that as I see a sweater I think of the sweater which I used to wear, and then of the circumstances which attended its destruction [. . .] at the sight of shoes I am reminded of my need for a new pair; then of the particular make of shoes which I ordinarily wear; then of a pair which I purchased a few months ago" and "so I may go on for hours, and in a large part my thoughts will be limited to the perception of objects and events which surround me, but in certain cases (e.g. sweater and shoes) the perception suggests a previous experience" (87). Scott concludes that mental activity follows a general "law":

Whenever there is in consciousness one element of a previous experience, this one element tends to bring back the entire experience. Things thought together or in immediate succession become "associated," or welded together so that when one returns it tends to recall the others. The sight of a shoe suggested the entire "shoe experience," in which I had entered a store, purchased a pair of shoes, carried on a conversation with the proprietor, etc. (89)

In Scott's semiotic paradigm, signifiers produce predictable signifieds; it is therefore necessary for the advertiser to understand the consumer's associative mental process works in order to reinforce or "weld" together associations. "The advertiser must know his customers," Scott asserts; "he must know their habits of thought, for it is too difficult to attempt to get them to think along new

lines. He must present his commodity in such a way that the readers can understand it without being compelled to think a new thought"; ultimately, "the advertisement should conform to their habitual modes of thought, and then the customers can read it and understand it with ease" (219).

While the advertising texts are informed, primarily, by William James's empiricist philosophy and not by the concomitant emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis, it is worthwhile, in this context, to remember that when May Sinclair introduced the phrase "stream of consciousness" in her 1918 *Egoist* review of Dorothy Richardson's first *Pilgrimage* books ("In this series there is no drama, no situation, no set scene. Nothing happens. It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson's stream of consciousness going on and on. And in neither is there any grossly discernible beginning or middle or end" [444]), she, too was referring to James. As Diane F. Gillespie explains, Sinclair "borrowed" the metaphor of the stream of consciousness from William James but, as "a student of philosophy who published two books on the subject [Sinclair] recognized the imprecision of the term. *Stream*, on one hand, connotes unity and continuity and suggests an active, creative self; on the other hand, it evokes multiplicity and change and a view of the self as a passive receiver of impressions" (437). Unlike the the desired effect of the successful advertisement (according to the advertising psychologists), which directs the subjective towards the objective, in Richardson's style, "the intense rapidity of the seizures," Sinclair writes, "defies you to distinguish between what is objective and what is subjective either in the reality presented or the art that

presents" (446). The stream of consciousness in fiction, then, was initially recognized for the way it blended or collapsed the subjective and objective or the "inner" and "outer." Richardson's reader, Sinclair imparts, is denied the ability of habitual associations.

As a suggestive contrast to the advertising text's presentation of the mind of the buyer while enjoying public transport, Virginia Woolf uses the following illustration of considering another passenger on a train as a way to explain (appropriately enough) the modernist's "movement" away from Georgian "materialist" fiction towards a fiction of subjective consciousness. "One night some weeks ago," Woolf begins, "I was late for the train and jumped into the first carriage I came to" and sits across from an older woman she calls Mrs. Brown:

Mrs. Brown and I were left alone together. She sat in her corner opposite, very clean, very small, rather queer, and suffering intensely. The impression she made was overwhelming. It came pouring out like a draught, like a smell of burning. What was it composed of—that overwhelming and peculiar impression? Myriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas crowd into one's head on such occasions; one sees the person, one sees Mrs. Brown, in the centre of all sorts of different scenes. I thought of her in a seaside house, among queer ornaments: sea-urchins, models of ships in glass cases. Her husband's medals were on the mantelpiece. ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 324)

The purpose of this description, Woolf explains, “is character imposing itself upon another person. Here is Mrs. Brown making someone begin almost automatically to write a novel about her. I believe all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite” (354). Woolf, tellingly, inverts the dialectic between the subjective and objective as the advertising texts would have it. Whereas a Georgian writer might describe the physical body of Mrs. Brown in order to pretend to some objective realism, Woolf sees Mrs. Brown as a floating signifier that suggests “myriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas.” Woolf calls into question the “shoe experience” Scott describes—and she goes further. She invites readers to engage in their own rejection of habitual associations. “May I end,” she asks, “by venturing to remind you of the duties and responsibilities that are yours as partners in this business of writing books, as companions in the railway carriage, as fellow travellers with Mrs. Brown?”:

For she is just as visible to you who remain silent as to us who tell stories about her. In the course of your daily life this past week you have had far stranger and more interesting experiences than the one I have tried to describe. You have overheard scraps of talk that filled you with amazement [. . .]. In one day, thousands of ideas have coursed through your brain; thousands of emotions have met, collided, and disappeared in astonishing disorder. Nevertheless, you allow the writers to palm off upon you a version of all this[. . .]. Never was there a more fatal mistake. It is this division between reader and writer, this humility on your part,

these professional airs and graces on ours, that corrupt and emasculate the books which should be the healthy offspring of a close and equal alliance between us. ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 336)

In this remarkable passage, Woolf not only emphasizes that the "disorder" of subjective consciousness is not merely a literary technique, but a shared experience. She emphasizes the value of interiority and speculation over an outward "version" of the self (or Mrs. Brown). Additionally, she asserts what has become one of defining features of the modern novel: the importance of the relationship between reader and writer in the creation of meaning. While Scott urges the importance of understanding the stream of consciousness so that, when confronted with an advertisement, "readers can understand it without being compelled to think a new thought," Woolf invites readers to collaborate in the construction of the text by reading the presentation of character against their own experiences of subjective consciousness. In other words, her readers are "compelled to think a new thought."

To Woolf's subversion of the "shoe experience" of habitual association could be added Clarissa Dalloway's walk down Bond Street. As she looks into store windows, her thoughts move away from the object of sale back in to her own interiority. She stops before

the window of a glove shop where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves. And her old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves. He had turned on

his bed one morning in the middle of the War. He had said, “I have had enough.” Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but her one daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them. (*MD* 11)

It is clear that Clarissa’s apprehension of the glove shop has not conjured up what Scott might call the “glove experience”—an association tied to the displayed product. Gloves lead to thoughts of class, Uncle William, the War, death, and Clarissa’s feeling of estrangement from her daughter. This form of “shopping,” wherein an item for purchase (be it a book, jewelry, a new car) is viewed, not as the ends to a purchase but a means for introspection and remembrance, is recurrent throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. Advertisements, like the unreadable sky-written brand name become, for the reading public of the novel, signs that multiply meanings and associations instead of fixing them. Woolf’s evident refusal to conform to the notion that “*whenever there is in consciousness one element of a previous experience, this one element tends to bring back the entire experience*” is pushed to the limit in her essay “Street Haunting,” where she uses the excuse of going out to buy a pencil as an occasion to leave behind the “objects which perpetually express the oddity of our own temperaments” (155) and to ponder the lives of those in drawing rooms she passes, women’s fashion, vendors in Soho, antique necklaces, the memory of a party, the lives of used books, the river from Waterloo bridge, and “what, then, is it like to be a dwarf?” (157). In other words, everything else but the “pencil experience” is given precedence over going to a stationary store to

buy a pencil. Instead, Woolf's "shopping" trip is an occasion to imagine the experiences of other Londoners, of all the "Mrs. Brown's" she sees, to "penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others" ("Street Haunting" 165).

While Scott and the other writers of the advertising texts worked to define and understand the stream of consciousness to "weld" desirable associations to products, to draw the consumer away from thought and introspection, writers like Richardson and Woolf were presenting consciousness as irreducible and unpredictably erratic. The outer or "material" world of objects, in *Pilgrimage* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, is of interest only insofar as it provides occasions for subjective interiority. This is not to say, however, that the stream of consciousness, as it is presented in fiction, is opposed to the "public sphere" and is engaged (as Adorno would have it) in a critique of the "culture industry"; what is important to notice is that the increased interest in understanding and exploring the subjective "stream" of consciousness took hold in advertising and in fiction at the same time, and both spoke to the postwar conceptualization of subjectivity as becoming more and more interiorized, of what Joel Pfister has called the rethinking of subjects as "psychological identities" (167).

Indeed, advertising itself began to evince and promote the same kinds of textual practices which are usually assumed to belong exclusively to "high" modernist narratives. John B. Opdycke, in *The Language of Advertising* (1925) claims that advertising copy is "literature," that "the copywriter is a poet and

painter and musician and historian all in one" (219) and, in an almost postmodern deconstruction of "high" and "low" culture, writes that the copywriter

must appear to our cultural instincts and traditions. And incidentally, by all this revolutionary evolution, or evolutionary revolution, he is making it increasingly difficult for us to say whether we buy magazines to read the good literature of the copymen or peruse the bad copy of the literary men. Only time can tell what's going to happen, but we prophesy that before long certain periodicals will advertise their advertising in their advertising quite as vigorously as they now announce their "reading smatter" that doesn't get itself read. Even now the cultural values of the former are in many cases dominant. (220)

The goal of advertising, as Opdycke sees it, is to "culturize" the public (219).

Opdycke follows this observation of the blurring boundaries between literature and copy with a peculiar paragraph, presumably meant to demonstrate his own literary skills:

Tennyrate, the Marathon moves amain—the contest, that is, between the old accepted masters of culture, gracing graphically and paragraphically the absorbing advertising pages, and the new would-be masters, yawping barbarically and even tonsorially and, of course, nervously thru the dryasdust columns. (220)

Opdycke here seems to be contrasting the “old accepted masters” of conventional literature with the new, cutting-edge “art” of copywriting, which, with its wordplay and Joycean portmanteau word (“dryasdust”) is fresh and modern.

It must be noted that Jennifer Wicke, in her discussion of advertising in *Ulysses*, suggests that the “stream of consciousness” as practiced by Joyce is a corollary of the “flow of advertising experience” that impresses upon us daily (140-1); and while this may be so, she does not acknowledge that the advertising of 1904 (the year in which *Ulysses* is set, and the actualities of which Joyce has famously preserved) was primarily discursive and grammatical, and was yet to be influenced by the style of Richardson or Joyce. Because Wicke confines herself to the advertisements mentioned in the novel, she can comment on the way Joyce incorporates “the energies of advertising language” (168), but because she does not look at advertising after *Ulysses*, she does not notice that advertising was looking to the energies of modernist writers like Joyce for a newer language.

Specifically, graphic design began to exhibit the same impulse toward defamiliarization, toward foregrounding language, toward experiments with textual materialism that are similar to those found in the novels of Joyce, Faulkner, and other novelists who employ the “stream” trope. In an article entitled “Doing the Unusual in Newspaper Typography” (1926), for the trade publication *Printer’s Ink*, W. Livingston Larned advocates the use of “acrobatic set-ups” and “unconventional style” to attract the reader’s attention (69). Noting

that “the typography of most advertising in newspapers does not attempt the unusual,” that “it is set quietly and without tumult,” he instructs, “make words acrobatic in the face of sameness and you have character, distinctiveness, a program of your own” (70). As an example, he describes a Cunard Lines advertisement that displayed text in collage form: words “placed at angles. They danced and cavorted. They ran down-hill and upward. Sometimes a name was partly cut away by the outer margin. It was much as if someone had taken a handful of white type and thrown it upon a black surface” (69). Larned could as well be describing a dadaist poem. His urging to make the advertising text “unusual” is not distinct from the “high” modernist impulse to “make it new”—and that is another shared characteristic of modernism and mass media.

It is indeed surprising that not more attention has been paid to the change from discursive to increasingly pictographic advertising appeals that followed Pound’s famous imagist manifesto. If “an ‘image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (Pound 130), this advice seems to have been taken up by none so enthusiastically as the advertising industry in the interwar years. The “modern style” of imagist advertisements had become so ubiquitous that *Punch* caricatured it in a cartoon (fig 1.) that juxtaposed the new with the former style of advertising, the kind which used to provide “a certain amount of information concerning the produce advertised.” The old method is represented by two “pictorial advertisements”: one depicts a stern doctor in pince-nez instructing a nurse to give his patient “nothing but” “Tonoid” for “colouring the corpuscles,” (with the

assurance that “5,000,000 doctors recommend Tonoid”), in the other, a family is gathered around for dinner with a box of “Bovo” on the table, against which is a paragraph of closely printed copy about the product. Below these panels are the “modern” advertisements for the same products, which simply feature



Fig. 1. “The modern style.” *Punch* 10 April (1929): 403.

vibrant slogans, and ebullient, bob-haired women. “The modern style, though undoubtedly more arresting,” the caption reads, “leaves a good deal to the imagination.” The images are intended to suggest feelings, to produce an “emotional complex in an instant of time.” Although Pound doesn’t specify what he means by “emotional complex,” he writes, “I use the term ‘complex’ rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart” (130). Peter Jones, in the introduction to his anthology of imagist poetry, writes that Hart, in his essay “The Conception of the Subconscious,” “describes Freud’s dream image as being conceived as constellated by a large number of unconscious complexes. As a result of the combination and interaction of these complexes a single image emerges into consciousness” (39). It seems fitting, then, that the advertising psychologists, who stressed the importance of “welding” an image to the stream of consciousness would favor advertisements that produced more immediate, less rational associative responses (the advertiser “must present his commodity in such a way that the readers can understand it without being compelled to think a new thought” [Scott 219]).

Advertisements of the interwar period did not only *appeal* to the buyer’s stream of consciousness. Surprisingly, many widely circulated advertisements tried to *represent it*. In a series of advertisements that appeared in magazines like *The Mentor* and newspapers like the *New York Times* throughout the 1920s, the Pelman Institute of America promoted the self-help booklet “Scientific Mind Training” as a way to suppress and focus the erratic “Grasshopper Mind” (fig. 2.) for personal and financial success. The Pelman

It is likely the negative emotion like disappointment, which is associated with occurrence of the negative event, is more

Address _____
City _____ State _____

Fig. 2. "The Man with the
'Grasshopper Mind.'"
Advertisement. *New York Times* 2
Sept. 1928: 66.

Fig. 2. "The Man with the
'Grasshopper Mind.'"
Advertisement. *New York Times* 2
Sept. 1928: 66.

Fig. 4. "What Does Your Wife Think of You, Now?" Advertisement. *New York Times* 11 Mar. 1928: 83.

Fig. 3. "The Gambler."
Advertisement. *New York Times* 9
June 1929: SM 13.

Fig. 4. "What Does Your Wife Think of You, Now?" Advertisement. *New York Times* 11 Mar. 1928: 83.

Institute promised that the book would “tell you the secret of self-confidence, of a strong will, of a powerful memory, of unflagging concentration [. . .]. It tells you how to banish the negative qualities like forgetfulness, brain fag, inertia, indecision, self-consciousness, lack of ideas, mind wandering, lack of system, procrastination, timidity.” The illustration accompanying the copy (which for these advertisements is copious) shows a man with his “grasshopper” thoughts floating around him: “Think I’ll try to make my Evenings worth Something,” and “I guess I’ll take up \$elling.” In another advertisement in the series, “The Gambler” (fig. 3), the copy warns that living in “hope” of a “lucky break” is akin to gambling, and “Scientific Mind Training” is offered as the anodyne. “Make your brain just a little bit more effective and you will MULTIPLY your earning power,” the advertisement insists. As with the “Man with the Grasshopper Mind,” an illustration of a man with his thoughts hovering over him appears at the top of the page. In “The Gambler,” however, only one of his “thoughts” appears in quotation marks (“things will be BETTER next year—they’re \$ure to give me a rai\$e”); phrases like “WAIT till I get my chance!” and “\$omething’s BOUND to happen!” appear to suggest the unarticulated. The phrases curve and almost overlap each other and, in both advertisements, drawings accompany each phrase. While a drawing of an open book and a rooster at sunrise correlate with the thoughts of the “Grasshopper mind” figure, “The Gambler” includes faint, seemingly half-formed sketches of figures and faces, which suggest representations of non-linguistic consciousness (or the “pre-speech level”). Finally, “What Does You

Wife Think of You, Now?" (fig. 4) plays upon anxieties of masculinity by asking if the reader's "wife is still hoping, dreaming, wishing?" because "YOU know that you have failed thus far to make her dreams come true." In the accompanying illustration, a woman sits looking at her pipe-smoking, newspaper reading husband, and her unspoken thoughts, presented in a variety of typefaces and half-formed images, rise above her: "P-o-o-r JIM," "All his friends earn *more* money," "He's getting older." The Pelman Institute advertisements contrast the unspoken stream of consciousnesses, rendered typographically as a combination of words and images, as the irrational that impedes "success," but which can be brought to logical order with the aid of the booklet.

In perhaps the most explicit example of an American advertisement that foregrounds the stream of consciousness trope, a Gillette promotion that appeared in magazines like *World's Work* and *The Golden Book* (fig 5.) starting in 1928 features a photograph of a man, in pajamas and slippers, sitting on the side of his bed, in a pose reminiscent of *The Thinker*. At the top of the page, in lower-case italics, appear his dyspeptic stream of consciousness: ". . . and so to bed . . . late . . . too much supper . . . wish I could get to sleep . . . bad dreams . . . business worries . . . dog barks . . . baby cries . . . time to get up . . . jangled nerves . . . irritable skin." The selling point is that a new Gillette blade is a "pick-me-up" for "mornings when your beard is as tough as your state of mind." While the use of the ellipsis here is similar to Richardson's use in

2 *The Golden Book Magazine for May, 1929*

... and so to bed ... late ... too much supper ... wish

I could get to sleep ... bad dreams ... business worries ...

dog barks ... baby cries ... time to get up ... jangled nerves

... irritable skin.

- *then* is the time your skin
needs the comfort of a fresh Gillette Blade



THE NEW FIFTY BOX
Fifty fresh double-edged Gillette Blades (10 Blades of steel) in a colored case that will serve you wherever as a handy button box, camera box or jewel case... Ideal as a gift, too. Five dollars at your dealer's.

THERE are mornings when a fresh Gillette Blade is better than any pick-me-up you can name.

And there are mornings when your beard is as tough and blue as your state of mind;


when the hot water faucet runs cold and your shaving cream is down to the last squeeze and you scarcely have time to lather anyway; mornings when all the cards seem stacked against your Gillette. But slip in a fresh blade. Enjoy the same smooth, clean shave that you get on the finest morning.

You have to go through the Gillette factory to understand how it's possible to pack so much dependable shaving comfort into a razor blade.

There you see some \$12,000,000 worth of machinery invented and improved continuously for twenty-five years for just one purpose: to make the Gillette Blade—*every* Gillette Blade—do its smooth, expert job *every* morning for the thirty million Americans who count on it.

There you see in operation the unique system which makes four out of nine Gillette blade department workers inspectors—paid a bonus for every defective blade they discard.

At least a dozen varying conditions affect the comfort of your shave. But the Gillette blade doesn't change. It is the *one* constant factor in your daily shave. Gillette Safety Razor Co., Boston, U. S. A.




★ ★ ★ **Gillette** 

Fig. 5. "... and so to bed ..." Gillette. Advertisement. *The Golden Book Magazine* May 1929: 2.

Pilgrimage to indicate the fragmentary movement of consciousness, the audience for the advertisement would have most likely recognized the elliptical breaks as a reference to Eugene O'Neill's method of presenting the unspoken in his enormously successful *Strange Interlude* which debuted in 1928. As with the Pelman advertisements, the Gillette advertisement contrasts the stream of thought, which consists of largely unwelcome associations—"irritable skin," "jangled nerves," "worries," "bad dreams"—with the reasoned, orderly text of the advertising copy. If, in the composition of the advertisement, the stream of consciousness is aligned with anxiety and discomfort, with restlessness, the product is presented as the "reasonable" solution. Unlike the random, chaotic stream of the modern mind, "the Gillette blade doesn't change," the consumer is assured: "It is the *one* constant factor in your daily shave."

In contrast to the Gillette advertisement, which juxtaposes the broken, elliptical thoughts of fragmented consciousness with traditional copy and a representational image (the thinking man, unable to sleep), the advertising campaign for Worthington's beer, which also began in 1928, presents a remarkable convergence of advertising and literary modernism (fig. 6). The pictorial part of the advertisement is a collage of overlapping images: a cautionary cross-roads traffic sign, a section of a road map, direction marker indicating the distance ahead to "Beer" and "Stout," a "BP" station globe, a Tudor-style inn with a modern automobile passing before it, a view of the countryside from a road, two gloved hands on a steering wheel, and a pleased-



Fig. 6. Worthington's Beer. Advertisement. 1928; rpt. in: Cathy Ross, *Twenties London: A City in the Jazz Age*. London: Philip Wilson, 2003. 49.

looking gentleman driving a large sedan is pictured in the middle of the advertisement, next to a bottle of Worthington's and a sandwich on a plate. As if the collage of images alone do not clearly signify a pictorial analog to the narrative stream of consciousness, the accompanying copy, with its fragments, unconventional use of upper-case words and—again—the employment of ellipses, approximate the disjointed, first-person thoughts typically assumed to be considered exclusive to the textual practice of “high” modernism: “. . . pretty village . . . SCHOOL . . . change down . . . George & Dragon . . . nice old pub . . . Lunch here? Brakes . . . switch off . . . TWO WORTHINGTONS, please” (qtd. in Ross 49).

While it is simple enough to construct the narrative of a long car trip with the promise of a cold pint ahead from the images, without what might be called the “interiorized” language of the copy, the fact that the viewer must construct a narrative at all from a series of overlapping, associative word and image fragments evokes the long-standing arguments that modernist texts require participatory interaction in the construction of textual meaning. It is perhaps important to note that the Worthington's advertisement, produced by the W. S. Crawford agency, had Edward McKnight Kauffer—a friend of Virginia Woolf and the designer of the wolf-head colophon for the Hogarth press—under employment at the time (cf. Willis 377). Early critics of the stream-of-consciousness novel observed—like John W. Crawford, writing about the debut of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* for the *New York Times*—these texts present “a challenge to the reader's own experience, and call[] for a sort of creative

collaboration" (BR10) and Roland Barthes has famously opposed the "readerly" texts of realism against the innovative, modernist "writerly" work which "make[s] the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (S/Z 4). What the Worthington's advertisement in particular suggests is no less than that the "producer" of the text is made into a consumer. To argue that these advertising texts may also be considered as representations of modernist technique is not to simply deconstruct the "high" and "low" culture binaries put forth by postmodernist apologists like Huyssen and Jameson; it is also to call into question the Adornoian claims about modernism's resistance to commodification—its autonomous "asociality" which "is the determinate negation of a determinate society" (*Aesthetic Theory* 226)—and Astradur Eysteinnsson's contention that

by interrupting the "realistic" processes of habitualized communication, modernism holds forth strategies of creative reading that can be used to unveil the discrepancies of a meaning production tending toward hegemony and to carry on a semiotic warfare against the homogenizing forces of mass communication. (*The Concept of Modernism* 238)

While the movement in modernist studies to consider the "increasingly intimate exchange between literary modernism and mainstream culture" (Leick 126) has done much to help blur the distinction between "high" and "low" (or "middlebrow") culture, most of the discussion has been from a "top-down" approach—taking into consideration, for example, that writers like Joyce, Woolf,

and Faulkner “lived in the same world of film, music, advertising, and promotion that is still around us, and that, like most denizens of the twentieth century, they had various and not entirely negative reactions to it” (North 29)—rather than from a “bottom-up” view of the way consumer culture also developed in the same world of novels like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. Instead of trying to consider the ways “modernism” worked either against—or even within—mass culture, advertisements like those for Gillette and Worthington’s suggest that, not only is this “dialectic” difficult to maintain, it may have never existed.

The Semiotic as Modernism

A more useful way to discuss the interconnectivity (if not the interdependence) of an “experimental” modernist literary trope like the stream of consciousness and mass culture might be found, with some modification, in Julia Kristeva’s elucidation of the semiotic and the symbolic. According to Kristeva, language (and the speaking subject who is posited by language) is comprised of oppositional elements: sound and sense, rhythm and meaning, intonation and communication—the “semiotic” and the “symbolic” (*Revolution* 13-106). The latter term is Lacan’s and, as Leon S. Roudiez explains, it “refers to the establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, [and] symbolic law” (6-7); the former term, the “semiotic” or *lé sémiotique* (as opposed to *la sémiotique*, the science of signs proper),

designates the repressed, the pre-Oedipal instinctual drives that underlie and transgress the symbolic, linguistic order:

The kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* precedes the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject[. . .]. The semiotic is articulated by flow and marks: facilitation, energy transfers, the cutting up of the corporeal and social continuum as well as that of signifying material, the establishment of a distinctiveness and its ordering in a pulsating [. . .] rhythmic but nonexpressive totality. (*Revolution* 27, 40)

In her essay “From One Identity to an Other,” Kristeva further defines her theory of the semiotic and explains its textual manifestations:

[T]his heterogeneousness to signification operates through, despite, and in excess of it and produces in poetic language “musical” but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiments, syntax itself [. . .]. The notion of *heterogeneity* is indispensable, for though articulate, precise, organized, and complying with constraints and rules [. . .] this signifying disposition is not that of meaning or signification: no sign, no prediction, no signified object [. . .]. We shall call this disposition *semiotic*. (133)

For Kristeva, “poetic language” (a type of discourse less concerned with communication than with experimentation) evidences this presubjective,

presymbolic functioning. Through rhythms and nonsense, poetic language reveals the workings of the *chora*, of the drives, of the unconscious (*Revolution* 25-30). The semiotic—which is associated with the pre- (or trans-) linguistic, with the maternal space anterior to the paternal law of symbolic signification, with repressed drives—is ever present in both the text and the speaking subject, putting each “in process/on trial” (*Revolution* 22; 58); the repressed drives that underlie and effectuate signification also threaten to return, to destabilize the linguistic and social order—and the individuated subject. But despite the way “the semiotic” has been oversimplified by some critics (cf. Eagleton 187-91; Murfin 297-98), it is not “women’s language” or even “*l’écriture féminine*”; it may be like the “feminine” in the same way that Lacan’s unconscious is *like* a language (both are suppressed by the ordering of the symbolic); however, the semiotic, because it represents a time before Oedipalization and hence before gendered subjectivity, undermines all fixed positions, definitions, and identities.

Importantly, the semiotic, however transgressive or disruptive to the symbolic, is nevertheless intertwined with it. Indeed, “language as social practice,” Kristeva explains, “necessarily presupposes these two dispositions, though combined in different ways [. . .]. Scientific discourse, for example, aspiring to the status of metalanguage, tends to reduce as much as possible the semiotic component” while in poetic language, the semiotic “tends to gain the upper hand”; yet “however elided, attacked, or corrupted the symbolic function might be in poetic language, due to the impact of the semiotic process, the symbolic function nonetheless maintains its presence” (“From One Identity to

an Other 134). In other words, while the semiotic underlies and challenges communicative discourse, it is inseparable from the symbolic. “The distinction that I [have] established between the semiotic and the symbolic,” Kristeva writes,

is an attempt to think of meaning not as structure but as process or procedure, by distinguishing between signs and their syntactic and logical concatenation, on the one hand, and things having to do with the transverbal, for to say preverbal leads to confusion: the semiotic is not independent of language; it interferes with language and, under its domination, articulates other arrangements of meaning, which are not significations, but rhythmic, melodic articulations. (“Elements for Research” 446)

Since Kristeva’s conceptualization of the semiotic and the symbolic initially appeared in her study of Joyce, Mallarmé, Lautréamont, and Céline, it has significantly informed poststructural reconsiderations of modernist art and literature; it has not, however, been fully considered as a way of *historicizing* modernism and modernist subjectivity. If the semiotic is aligned with nonsense, with the irrational, with the unsayable—and the symbolic is equated with the linguistic and the existing social order and its constraints—it is reasonable to consider the “semiotic” as *the* signifier for what has been accepted as “high” modernism: textual and stylistic experimentalism, “incomprehensibility” and fragmentation, the stream of consciousness “technique”; and to consider the “symbolic” as the signified of *modernity*: “bourgeois,” conventional values, realism, rationality, “mass” communication. If the semiotic and symbolic are

heterogeneous but inseparable, then this offers a way to see the the signifiers of “modernism” working both within and against the signifieds of mass culture and eliminates the need to use the value-laden language of “high” and “low” (or “middlebrow”) as it negates the idea of a binary between an adversarial (reactionary *or* revolutionary) modernism and the consuming public, yet offers a way to distinguish and discuss the reception and transformations of a modernist trope (like the stream of consciousness) within the popular culture of the period. Although Kristeva has spoken in interviews against the “leveling, the uniformation and elision of all differences” in a “mediatic society” and that “one has to outwit this mechanism, this logic” (qtd. in Guberman 216, 218), and while she seems to be closer to Adorno and the Frankfurt School in her resistance to the culture industry, if the subject is “always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic” and “no signifying system [the subject] produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, [but] is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both” (*Revolution* 24), then any text produced within “mediatic society” must also “necessarily” evidence the heterogeneity of the semiotic within the symbolic.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to unequivocally accept Kristeva’s claims that the semiotic is a “revolutionary” force, a “negativity” that challenges the authority of the social order. As the *Punch* cartoon—as well as the Gillette and Worthington’s advertisements—illustrates, the “mediatic” has already begun to privilege the “transverbal” evocation over the discursive appeal to the buyer’s reason. To reconsider Kristeva’s claim about scientific discourse in light of

present-day advertising, it seems that it is much more like her idea of poetic language insofar as it subsumes communicative discourse as much as possible to the semiotic: to music, gesture, image; to appeals to the “repressed, instinctual” drives (“From One Identity to an Other” 136). Indeed, it is difficult, in the Internet age, to read Kristeva’s description of fantasy as a semiotic “irruption of drives within the realm of the signifier [that] disrupt[s] the signifier and shift[s] the metonymy of desire” and not think of advertisements which break in and disrupt so frequently in order to “shift the metonymy of desire” into a monotony of desire. Moreover, in her discussion of the work of Barthes (and in the title of her collection of essays, *Desire in Language*), “desire” becomes synonymous with the semiotic:

Desire causes the signifier to appear as heterogeneous and, inversely, indicates heterogeneity through and across the signifier[. . .]. Perhaps one can posit that, for Barthes, “desire” seems to signify the recognition of heterogeneous element in relation to the symbolic—the space of material contradiction.

(“How Does One Speak to Literature?” 116)

As the examples from Kitson and Scott’s advertising texts indicate, the emerging field of psychological marketing wanted to understand the stream of consciousness as a way to direct it to desire and purchase. In his essay, “Understanding the Consumer’s Mind,” Kitson traces the “stages in the act of buying” from getting the consumer’s attention—which is difficult because “the mind is such an active thing that it cannot remain still[:] like a stream is is ever in

motion" (132)—to "the state of mind that is best designated by the term desire" which he describes as

a complex state of mind consisting of first: A play of the imagination in which the consumer imagines himself in relation to the commodity; a feeling of pleasantness accompanies this; then comes movements, either actual or incipient, toward the commodity[. . .]. [Until] the consumer acquires the commodity, experiences a feeling of pleasantness and thus fulfills the desire. (133)

While far from Lacan's notion of the "*objet petit a*," Kitson's summation that "in the case of the purchase, if the main idea is to grow in strength, its brain system must draw off from the other symptoms the brain energy resident within them, until the energy of the brain is all drained off into the one system, which means the triumph of the idea" (134) appears to advocate the excitation of drives as integral to shaping consumer behavior.

To consider the semiotic as an aspect of advertising and mass culture and to call its "revolutionary" potential into question is not to deny its ability to undermine and distort the hegemony of the symbolic (indeed, consumer culture could be dependent upon these distortions—one need think only of the fashion industry, for example—for its perpetuation), nor is to imply that commercial texts, which employ aspects of "poetic language," should be elevated and given the same respect as literary works, for to do so would be to elide the facts of the media's role in the manipulation and reification of

subjectivity, but rather to suggest that all texts produced during the period are “modern” and that the literary and the commercial were inseparable and similarly engaged in exploring (and exploiting) the stream of consciousness. Before Clarissa Dalloway departs for her morning shopping trip, where she will look into store windows on Bond Street and allow her thoughts to wander back to the time she threw a shilling into the Serpentine, advertisers had already begun trying to understand her consciousness in order to get her to throw her shillings their way.

The Trend of Consciousness

The stream of consciousness, in its literary form, was as ubiquitous as any advertising campaign of the period. The idea that the trope was exclusively employed by canonical modernists like Joyce and Woolf is untrue—as it appeared in magazine writing, newspapers, and best-selling fiction. While Janice Radway, in her study of the Book-of-the Month Club, writes that “literary modernism is conspicuously absent from the list of books the judges recommended as appropriate to a large general audience” (179), she seems to assume that the judge’s opinions reflected those of consumer culture, and appears to base her claims about the absence of “literary modernism” in the list because it did not include “William Faulkner, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, [or] James Joyce” (179). Despite the fact that each of these writers did produce bestsellers and (as Karen Leick reminds us) garnered a great deal of public

attention, the lack of inclusion of their names is not proof that “literary modernism,” as it is signified by textual experimentalism, the stream of consciousness, and the semiotic (not to mention what might be called the “thematic” elements of literary modernism: disillusionment, uncertainty, the rejection of “bourgeois” values) was not popular with “a large, general audience.”

Indeed, a 1931 *New York Times* article entitled “How Long, O Author?” lamented the seemingly endless rush of stream-of-consciousness fiction. These books, often marked by sentences “doubtless full of hidden meaning, [that] contained two words” with the rest “left to asterisks and the imagination of the reader” not only “won laurels from the critics, awards from the prize givers,” but also had “buyers enough to put them in the front rank of best sellers” (21). Contemporary authors, the article concludes, have taken “the more popular road into the subconscious” where “there is no end to what can be written when the hero is allowed to drift down the stream of consciousness” (21). An earlier *New York Times* article, “Vogue in Novels,” points out that, while “all sorts of novels are written during any given period,”

The genre of the moment is what, for lack of a shorter term, must be called the stream-of-consciousness novel, the psychological novel of earlier decades driven to the extreme[. . .]. Any one looking back over his reading will recall the novels of the type discussed. Some have appeared in the lists of “best sellers”; more than one has incurred the displeasure of the censor. (E4)

However fashionable the trend, “Freud must eventually lose power” and the “stream of consciousness” fad will pass, the writer argues (E4). By 1934, Joseph Warren Beach could write of “the stream-of-consciousness epidemic” that was spreading like “an infection to which any one is liable” and that “almost anyone may sooner or later manifest mild symptoms of this disease” (517).

Surprisingly, these novels had so saturated the literary marketplace that Houghton Mifflin introduced “red star” novels: novels with a band around the dust jacket “on which red stars are displayed” to indicate “a good, rip-snorting adventure yarn” in order “to save the book buyer the trouble of pawing over a lot of problem novels and psychological studies” (“Books and Authors” BR14). The “Current Magazines” column in the April 7, 1929 issue of the *New York Times* singled out Marjorie Nicolson’s article “The Professor and the Detective,” which answers the question, “what do college professors read?” According to Nicolson, they read detective novels because they want plot and a rest from “the ‘stream of consciousness’ which threatens to engulf us in Lethean monotony”; they prefer

analyses of purpose, controlled and directed by a thinking mind;
from formlessness to form; from the sophomoric to the mature;
most of all, from a smart and easy pessimism which interprets men
and the universe in terms of unmoral purposelessness to a re-
belief in a universe governed by cause and effect. (BR 11)

In their “revolt against the ‘psychological novel’” (BR 11), the professors in the Smith College English Department do not appear to be anticipating the

postmodern by privileging the “low” form of genre fiction over “Literature”; their antipathy is steeped in a reactionary conservatism against the pervasive appeal of modernism.

Similarly, Paul Shorey, in his 1928 *Atlantic Monthly* article, “Literature and Modern Life,” argues against teaching modernist works at the expense of the classics. For Shorey, the modern stream-of-consciousness novel is ubiquitous and even threatening. While the “literary artist,” Shorey writes, “may prefer to read new books to learn the latest tricks of technique [and] an inquisitive elderly or middle-aged mind may indulge its discursive curiosity with no great harm” and “the scholar, stabilized by the ballast of better reading, may safely explore these waters to prove himself an adventurous spirit,” these popular fictions are anything but ennobling to the general reading public and the young:

[W]hy should the mass of educated men and women, of those students whose reading will still exercise a formative influence on intelligence and character, feed their minds exclusively or mainly on the innutritious, if sometimes stimulating, confections of contemporaneous literature? Of any contemporaneous literature, but especially that of an age of jazz or transition and disintegration? Why, above all, should we encourage or allow such literature to preoccupy the attention and the memory of high-school and collegiate youth? (617)

Shorey blames the “tyranny of present fashion” for student’s lack of interest in “good older literature that has survived” (618). The “wholesome” classics are being forgotten, he claims, “and so it comes to pass that the loan library of a great American university hands out to young girls the unspeakable soliloquies of the nastiest of Irish novels that blasphemes the name of Homer” (614-15). While it would be easy to dismiss Shorey as an old crank trying to defend the canon (and young women’s virtue) against the radically new “modernist” literature, his argument offers an interesting historical insight: for Shorey, modern fiction is associated with “the output of best sellers” and jazz; “there is not the slightest danger,” he claims, “that any of us will close his mind to the modern ideas that blow upon us from every quarter of the wind” because “the commonplaces of modernism are thundered with interminable iteration from every speaker’s platform [and] [e]very teacher knows that there is no danger of his students missing these” (621). Rather than casting popular culture as the “other” to modernism, here modernism *is* the popular culture that threatens the preserve of “the classics.”

To consider modernism in general and the stream of consciousness in particular as a popular culture form offers a way to understand some of the animosity it engendered. It is surprising that, instead of classifying it as a “highbrow” form, many of the earliest critical responses to the literary stream of consciousness found it too facile and accessible. As the editor for the “Turns with a Bookworm” column in the *Oakland Tribune* explained in 1928, the “method,” gives beginning writers “the notion that all they’ve got to do is sit

down and tell their souls, and it will make a book"; that all one must do is report "absolutely every important action and circumstance of his life, within the space of 24 hours or less" (6S). Similarly, in her article for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, "'Stream of Consciousness,'" Katherine Fullerton Gerould decries the trope as "the fictional fashion of the moment"; "this famous 'stream,'" she notes, is a disturbance, not a flow" and

the reason, doubtless, for this popularity [. . .] is the extreme ease of it. Any clever sophomore can do it[:] you can do it, I can do it. It is construction, narrative flow, selection, massing, the vivid conceiving of human figures and human fates, that are hard. Asterisks, and loose images, and no syntax, are easy. (234)

Gerould makes clear what is only suggested by Shorey: that these novels, informed by the new psychology, border on the pornographic. When "heroes and heroines have only to let themselves drift," she writes, "sex enters with almost more insidious ease. The American public, like any other public one has ever heard of, has a predilection . . . for salacity" (234). Writers "'do' the stream of consciousness," Gerould claims, because "it offers the peculiar opportunity for exploiting two universal human tastes—the taste for sentiment and the taste for salacity [. . .]. Sex and squish [*sic*] [. . .] properly proportioned, will make a best-seller and day, and do make most bestsellers" (234). As a "fictional fashion," these novels were discussed in ways that echo critiques of mass culture. Herbert J. Gans, in his *Popular Culture and High Culture*

summarizes the arguments about the “harmful effects” of popular culture as follows:

popular culture is emotionally destructive because it provides spurious gratification and is brutalizing in its emphasis on violence and sex; that it is intellectually destructive because it offers meretricious and escapist content which inhibits people’s ability to cope with reality; and that it is culturally destructive, impairing people’s ability to partake of high culture. (41)

As much as the modernist text may now be considered “traditional” or canonical literature with its own institutionalized authority, to consider its reception is to see how the stream of consciousness not only posed a challenge to realist narrative conventions, but also to notions of “high culture.” There is a particular anxiety about the maintenance of publication standards expressed by Wilson Follett in his essay for *Harper’s*, “Literature and Bad Nerves.” According to Follett, the practice of the new writers who attempt to present “a sensation . . . a drop in the stream of consciousness” will “logically demand a world in which every man shall be his own poet-laureate” (112). Follett blames the advertising jingle and the jazzified age for the rise of stream-of-consciousness fiction:

Who would then have supposed that this idiom [. . .] was to become the language of the future? Yet so it has become; one only has to thumb over the pages of an armful of respectable novels to find the rows of dots which prove it. The fashionable style of this decade runs to verbless sentences and inarticulate

gasps after the inexpressible, with files of dots to label its innuendoes, tangential meanings, and overtones—the things which can be felt but not said. The dotted style, as I take the liberty of naming it, is based on the idea that an elision is as good as a meaning any day, if not rather better. If you can't utter it, or haven't the patience, hint that it is unutterable [and] call it a perfectly subjective and naïve expression of your inner consciousness. (115)

Follett blames this style of writing for contributing to the “nervous” cultural climate and the denigration of prose—and he might have seen the culmination of his argument in the Gillette advertisement's mention and elliptical depiction of “. . . jangled nerves . . .” in its advertising copy. Indeed, this “dotted style” had even begun to be parodied in newspapers and widely-circulated magazines. The page-long “‘I Converse With My Criminal Subconscious’ by One of the Criminally Insane,” which appeared in *Life Magazine* in 1928, lampooned the stylistic appearance and the glorification of the irrational, intrusive interior monologue. It begins,

Let me alone, can't you? . . . Aw, please, you big bully! . . . I just want to sit here peacefully and count the bars on my window—they're all the bars I've got now . . . Prisoner Pales as Judge Flails Ales Sales. . . Brilliant Boy Scout Bugler Blames Bad Booze on Beer Ban. . . . Local Lay Leader Lauds Liquor Law, Says Salvation Sure. I can make a poem on that: *Some of the boys are*

wet-wet-wet; Some of the boys are dry; Some of the boys have got nobody home (dum dee dum) And so am I!. . . I wonder if I can stand on my head?!. . . Oh goody, it makes all my ideas run down my ears! [sic] (10).

As a stylistic caricature, this “conversation” is revealing in its exaggeration in a way that most New Critically inspired definitions of the stream of consciousness as a formal “technique” are not. The image of a prisoner ranting to himself in a padded cell evokes the idea of a restraining, repressing conscious rationality over an uncontainable, expressive “subconscious” irrationality—an irrationality marked by elliptical gaps, word play, and the bric-a-brac of alliterative newspaper headlines. Here, the “criminal’s” obsession with prohibition is interchangeable with “inhibition,” and the tension between the prohibitive and the disruptive illustrates the heterogeneity of the symbolic and the semiotic that distinguishes stream of consciousness narratives.

“‘I Converse with my Criminal Subconscious’” was among many parodies of the trope in *Life*, which ran sidebar columns like Lafayette Lyre’s “Food for Thought,” wherein phrases like “*ham sandwiches*” and “*hors d’Œuvres*” were taken as an occasion for free-associative prose (the heading “*pickled eggs*,” for example, is followed by: “a jangling slot machine in full crash . . . linoleum, and spittoons where some one had missed . . . ‘See what the boys in the back room want’ . . . ‘Two more here, please’ . . . a greasy deck of ‘Steamboat’ playing cards . . . a copy of the New York *American* scandal sheet, damp with beer” [32]). In 1927, Henry William Hanemann’s “Let Us Re-

Joyce” presented an unpunctuated paragraph for *Life* readers that both defined and ridiculed the stream of consciousness:

And then there’s this way of writing and a fine sap anybody is to read it you just put down whatever comes into your head and that’s art yes it is like fun you can’t be blamed for what comes into your head but you certainly ought to use your judgment about what comes out still nature abhors a vacuum my mother abhorred vacuum cleaners she said they made a horrible noise brr brr brr shut that damn thing up how can I ever become a great writer well if you think this is the way to become a great writer you had better start right in peddling bonds[. . .]. ([sic] 5)

Because parodies of Joyce and Stein were not infrequent in newspapers and magazines of the period—as Karen Leick notes in her “Popular Modernism: Little Magazines and the American Daily Press”—it is not surprising that the reading public could be expected to have some familiarity with modern writers; what is surprising is that these parodies presume a general understanding of a particular modernist stylistic technique. Indeed, Tupper Greenwald had a reappearing column in *Life* called “Stream of Consciousness,” that eschewed punctuation for humor. In one of these segments, subtitled “During a Reading of Original Poetry at a Middlewestern Literary Club,” the reader is dropped into the wandering mind of an audience member who is ready to make her exit. The article concludes with the following:

I'm through through do you understand good-by good-by
 forever good-by good-by good-by good-by good-by I'll just say
 good-by good-by Mrs. Apthorpe it's been a charming evening
 and I wish I could stay for the discussion but I really have to go
 out and get some horseradish that's what I'll say I'll say that I am
 going a-gypsying I'll say that may love is a fountain of
 horseradish Mrs. Apthorpe I am going to say Mrs. Apthorpe my
 dear Mrs. Apthorpe I am going to say my God what am I going to
 say my GOD [. . .]. (28)

While it is clear that the pretension of “original poetry” and modernist prose are being satorized here, that the literary club is “middlewestern” makes it clear that the barb is meant, not for the “highbrows,” but for the average or “middlebrow” reader who has embraced and conventionalized contemporary literature and “fashions” like the stream of consciousness. Greenwald’s parody seems pointed at the crowds who came to ask Muriel Draper about Stein and Joyce and who enthusiastically attended lectures like “How We Reach Our Sub-Conscious Minds” (which, as Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd in their sociological study of 1920s America, *Middletown*, explain, enjoyed enormous success [298])—as well at the readers of *Life Magazine* who may or may not have recognized themselves.

Defining The Stream of Consciousness

However valuable the most frequently cited critical studies of the literary stream of consciousness may have been, it is unfortunate that the zenith of their appearance in the decades following the Second World War coincided with the rise of New Criticism, which necessitated “close reading” and formalist discussions of aesthetic technique at the expense of historical considerations. Indeed, it is due to the institution and former hegemony of New Criticism—which developed in no small part as a response to the “difficulty” of modernist texts—that, as Astradur Eysteinsson contends, modernism came to be characterized as “autonomous” and apolitical: “by securing the autonomy of literature,” he writes, by “preventing it from being overly ‘polluted’ or even swallowed up by ‘other’ modes of social discourse,” New Criticism “protect[ed] its vulnerable specificity and justif[ied] its existence” as an important methodology (77). It is not surprising, then, that texts like Robert Humphrey’s *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (1954), Melvin Friedman’s *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method* (1955), Leon Edel’s *The Modern Psychological Novel* (1955), Shiv K. Kumar’s *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* (1963), along with Frederick J. Hoffman’s more oblique (but no less important) discussion of the stream of consciousness in *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* (1945) and Dorrit Cohn’s *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978), each have in common a

formal approach to the narrative styles of Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner and little concern (save, perhaps, Hoffman) for the cultural context in which these narratives emerged—without which, the stream of consciousness novel appears, falsely, to be the exclusive product of a few independent canonical authors.

Robert Humphrey begins his study by claiming his book “is a kind of manual of *how* to write stream-of-consciousness fiction” (v) and echoes Lawrence R. Bowling’s distinction between the “stream of consciousness technique” (which for Bowling is stylistic device for presenting an unmediated “direct quotation of the mind” [345]) and the “interior monologue” which is limited to a character’s first-person consciousness (345). Humphrey goes further, however, by considering the “stream-of-consciousness novel” as a genre which is concerned with the “exploration of the prespeech levels of consciousness for the purpose, primarily, of revealing the psychic being of the characters” (4), as opposed to the “techniques” or methods used to present consciousness, like “direct interior monologue, indirect interior monologue, omniscient description, and soliloquy” which indicate various levels of authorial interference (23). Humphrey is most compelling when he turns away from the parsing of narrative forms and suggests contexts for considering the trope, like psychoanalysis (“the chief technique in controlling the movement of stream of consciousness in fiction has been an application of the principals of psychological free association” [43]) and cinematic devices (terms like “‘montage’ [. . .] ‘multiple-view,’ ‘slow-ups,’ ‘fade-outs,’ ‘cutting,’ ‘close-ups,’

‘panorama,’ and ‘flash-backs’” are briefly mentioned by Humphrey as corollaries for the way novels employ free-association [49]). Ultimately, Humphrey writes, “the stream-of-consciousness writer has to do two things: (1) he has to represent the actual texture of consciousness, and (2) he has to distill some meaning from it for the reader” (63).

While *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* aimed to clarify the technical aspects of narrative form, it is also responsible for some obfuscation. Humphrey does not just ignore the way the “technique” appeared in a variety of fiction of the period—he asserts that the stream of consciousness novel rose with Woolf and Joyce and faded, only to become “main stream” in recent (at the time of Humphrey’s writing) fiction like Warren’s “relatively popular” *All the King’s Men* (113-14). It is no doubt that the terministic screen of New Criticism limited his ability to consider authors like Fannie Hurst, who wrote best-selling stream of consciousness novels, and his own classification of the stream of consciousness as a genre with its own techniques does not lend itself to an acknowledgment of the way ostensibly realist novels like Warwick Deeping’s *Sorrell and Son* employed and adapted signifiers of “prespeech levels of consciousness” (for example, when the gentlemanly Mr. Roland walks into his shabby hotel room, we are told, “His mental comments followed immediately upon his visual perceptions” which consist of “‘No wardrobe. Now—where the devil—? Faded green paint,—dirty paper—strings of pink roses between black and white lines. One hook off door. Carpet—h’m—, I wonder what a

vacuum cleaner would fetch out of it. Brass bed, one knob missing. Yellow chest of drawers, one handle missing'" [45]).

Melvin Friedman, in his *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method*, builds upon Humphrey's distinction between genre ("stream of consciousness designates a type of novel in the same way as 'ode' or 'sonnet' designates a type of poem" [3]) and the interior monologue, to which he adds the importance of "sensory impression" which is "concerned with the region furthest from the focus of attention": it is "the writer's nearest attempt at recording pure sensations and images" (Friedman 6). Friedman is particularly interested in what he sees are musical elements (like the "leitmotiv" and "fugue" [14-16]) in the narratives which approximate the extra- or non-linguistic aspects of consciousness. While a claim like "the mere presence [. . .] of interior monologue and sensory impression in the stream of consciousness novel marks immediately the intrusion of poetry in the midst of prose" (19) seems like a promising antecedent to Kristeva's notion of signifiante, Friedman is careful to point out that writers like Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner (unlike Gertrude Stein) were in control of their techniques and employed them to achieve "the contemplative stasis one had come to expect in stream of consciousness fiction" (52).

The Modern Psychological Novel, by Leon Edel, is remarkable for its blend of progressive, almost poststructural arguments against the codification of meaning in modern novels, and its embarrassingly conservative treatment of gender and narrative subjectivity. Edel departs from the move to embed and

traditionalize the modern psychological novel within literary history, because “to do so is perhaps to dismiss too airily the deeper meaning for the novel of our time of this ‘inward-turning’ of a whole group of twentieth-century artists” (18) and he is disapproving of critics like Humphrey and Friedman whose concern is with imposing order on these experimental fictions: “we must not lose ourselves,” he insists, “in a search for label-definitions; nor should we attempt to make them tightly fit certain works that can better be described than labelled” (58); nor should we try “to impose conventional order” upon them, because at times, “our obligation is rather to perceive [the text] *in its disorder*”(164). The way Edel allows for textual uncertainty and a consideration of the role of the reader who is placed “within” a character’s stream of consciousness and “involved with its *discontinuity* or scrambled state” (199) sounds as if he might be anticipating Kristeva’s notion of textual heterogeneity; however, the examples of subjective reading he provides suggest that he is unable—if not unwilling—to identify with any but a stable male position. In his dismissive discussion of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, he writes that he found it “tedious” to have to be confined to the primary character, Miriam Henderson’s, subjective perspective:

I could not adopt the one “point of view” she offered me, an angle of vision that required more identification than I—as indeed many of her male readers—could achieve [. . .]. We can sometimes feel ourselves to be trapped spectators in the mind of a woman

possessing no marked personality, often sentimental and
belligerently feminine and rather unimaginative. (73)

Even if Edel's gender bias is set aside, it is difficult to accept his claims for the importance of accepting uncertainty and disorder if he is only willing to accept the text on his terms and identify with perspectives that reflect and reinscribe his own.

Shiv K. Kumar, in *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*, argues that Henri Bergson's ideas of "duration" ("*la durée*") and "flux" offer a fuller reading of the novels of Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner, because it is in keeping with James's idea of a "continuity of consciousness without which it could not be called a stream" (15). According to Kumar, the idea of "flux" is what "Bergson designates as *la durée*, a process of creative evolution which does not lend itself to any logical or intellectual analysis. *La durée* or psychological time thus becomes the distinguishing feature of the stream of consciousness novel"; "The new novelist," Kumar claims, "accepts with full awareness inner duration against chronological time as the only true mode of apprehending aesthetic experience" (7). While it is common to encounter phrases like the "flux of consciousness" and a character "in the process of becoming" in critical discussions of stream of consciousness texts, Kumar's argument for a Bergsonian reconsideration of the trope did not lead to any paradigmatic changes in the scholarship. One reason for this might be his insistence that a Bergsonian perspective is more suitable than a psychoanalytic approach, "since the stream of consciousness novelists are essentially

concerned with presenting individual personality and experience in terms of artistic sensibility” and “a psycho-analytical interpretation of the stream of consciousness novel would hardly illuminate its treatment and presentation of *la durée, mémoire involuntaire* and intuition, nor would it bring out the significance of the various protagonists’ preoccupation with the ultimate nature of reality” (3).

The problem with Kumar’s argument is that, regardless of his attempt to replace the epistemological intentions of the modern novelists, their texts, even when they were dismissed, were understood as “Freudian”: an early critical description that might be considered representative comes from N. P. Dawson, who writes that “the authors of the new style of writing are not so much writing at all as expressing themselves; expressing their sub-conscious as well as their conscious selves; sticking at nothing . . . but telling ‘everything—everything’” (1179). As Frederick J. Hoffman writes in *Freudianism and the Literary Mind*, though the psychological novel “existed long before Freud’s work on the dream or his subsequent statements about the unconscious, it is his ‘depth psychology’ which has been responsible for the variations upon [the stream of consciousness] form” (130). In his excellent cultural study, *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade*, Hoffman states that “the most important single *formal* result of the Freudian influence was not surrealism but the ‘stream of consciousness’ technique” (246); and, despite the objections to Freudian psychoanalysis by writers like Joyce, it was no doubt due to the popularity of Freud that the stream of consciousness novel entered into the

cultural vocabulary. As Hoffman notes, “by 1920 there were hundreds of popular summaries, expositions, and distortions of Freud’s original works” (232) and in particular, Freud’s notion of repression gained a wide audience.

Hoffman writes that “for the young men and women of the period,” “repression”

served as a convenient label for all their grievances against society. It was their feeling that the absurd, exorbitant moral demands society had made upon its victims had culminated in a national neurosis. Repression became an American illness. With little or no thought of personal responsibility—that is, the ever-present conflict between ego and id, which, Freud insists, antedates any precise formulation of conventions—they decided that any force was evil that stood in the way of a full, wholesome, primitive expression of natural impulses. Repression stood for all the social formulas that prevented the natural expression of life impulses. (*The Twenties* 357)

Unique as Kumar’s contribution to the scholarly literature on the subject may be, any study of the stream of consciousness novel that attempts to deny the relevance of psychoanalysis as a reading heuristic also rejects the significant role psychoanalysis played in the shaping of the culture that received (and popularized) these texts. As Hoffman makes clear, “the overwhelming popularity of psychoanalysis [. . .] affected not only the matter of sexual morality but the entire range of human activity and consciousness” (230). If the general readership of the interwar period understood Freudianism as a conflict

between repression and impulses, that may be one way to account for the popularity of stream of consciousness narratives that foreground the dialectic between the symbolic and the semiotic.

As an indication of how matter-of-factly it was assumed that “stream of consciousness” was inseparable from Freudian psychoanalysis (regardless of how much influence it actually exerted on writers like Joyce or Woolf), the 1934 edition of the creative writing handbook *Narrative Technique*, by Thomas and Camelia Uzzell, aimed at “college students of English composition” as well as “the free lance fiction writer working out his artistic salvation alone” (i) includes a section on “The Technique of the Stream of Consciousness Story” which addresses the “‘craze’ for this type of writing” (460). The Uzzell’s introduce the “technique” by pointing out that it is a product of “the new psychology” and that “the essentials of Freudian psychology were announced to the world over a generation ago . . . and [we] suppose all cultivated people possessed an equivalent understanding by 1920. Today most people who can read are familiar with the terms ‘complex’ and ‘suppressed desires’ and ‘wish fulfillments’” (460). As for the nuts and bolts of presentation,

the two ways in which the stream-of-consciousness story differs from the conventional story of the past are: (1) A picture of the subconscious life of the character is added to the picture of his conscious behavior and (2) The portions of the narrative in which the subconscious life is conveyed are written in the free-association manner. (461)

“Quite simply,” the Uzzell’s conclude, “it is a struggle between a conscious, rationalizing mind and an unconscious, irrational and all-powerful impulse” (464). They call this type of writing the “Freudian style” and point out that “even the popular new literature of today is producing its effect by an emphasis on the subconscious” (462). If it is apparent that the general reader (and the general writer) considered the stream of consciousness synonymous with “Freudian style,” and if critics like Humphrey, Friedman, and Edel all acknowledge the operation of the levels of consciousness Freud defined, it must be pointed out that the phrase “stream of consciousness” is misleading, if it is not a misconception. Each of the studies of the trope, without exception, begin with a mention of William James and a quoted definition from his *Principles of Psychology*, like the following:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as “chain” or “train” do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed: it flows. A “river” or “stream” are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.* (55)

Steinberg declares that this “is a figure of considerable vividness and admirably characterizes the meanderings of the mind on the verge of dissolution into the unconscious” (2). None of the critics, even if they hedge over the imprecision of the definition, point out, as Dorothy Richardson did after the idea was applied for the first time to her writing, “its perfect imbecility” (qtd. in Steinberg 76). As a

metaphor, it is inconsistent with the way thought is presented in modernist texts: to take Clarissa Dalloway as an example, her thoughts do, at times, “flow,” but more often, they turn back to scenes from her past. If it is a commonplace in modernist studies to point out the remembrance of lost time in the narratives, it is awkward that no one has pointed out that streams flow in only one direction. More importantly, when May Sinclair applied the phrase to describe Richardson’s style, she was using a concept from empiricist philosophy which had already begun to feel outdated as Freud’s ideas entered the culture-at-large. To use, then, a concept based on a pre-Freudian model of the mind to describe a technique that illustrates Freud’s idea of an ego “on the verge of dissolution into the unconscious,” is indeed problematic. Despite its “perfect imbecility” and the incongruity of its epistemological assumptions with the psychoanalytic view of the divided mind, to propose a new term now would only serve to deny the historical use of “stream of consciousness” as a popular interwar description of a wide variety of textual practices.

Dorrit Cohn tries to do just that, however, in *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Cohn essentially presents new labels for Humphrey’s “techniques.” She proposes “psycho-narration,” “quoted monologue,” and “narrated monologue,” in place of the less precise categories of indirect interior monologue, direct interior monologue, and soliloquy. While “psycho-narration” may be a superior term because it “identifies both the subject-matter and the activity it denotes” (11), and while Cohn’s other designations may more agilely identify the ways, for

example, omniscient narration appears in the midst of Dorothy Richardson's first-person descriptions (12), or the way the "sub-verbal depth of the mind" is presented through the language of interior monologue (56-7), Cohn's narratological study is engaged in the search for a revised grammar of form, not with interpretation or historical contextualization. In fact, Cohn criticizes both Edel and Humphrey for oversimplifying "the formal problem by reducing all techniques to a single and vague 'stream-of-consciousness technique,'" and "at the same time overcomplicat[ing] it by association with broad psychological and aesthetic issues" (10). Cohn's critical perspective manages to reinforce the idea of modernist autonomy by concentrating exclusively on "the formal problem." What is particularly disappointing about *Transparent Minds*—but the same might be said of each of the aforementioned critical studies of the stream of consciousness—is that for all its detailed discussion of shifting verb tenses that signify narrative modulations of interiority, it pays little attention to textual and typographical variants which signify the appearance of a subjective consciousness. It might be helpful to know that "all interior monologues transform colloquial language along essentially similar lines [and that] to a greater or lesser degree they all conform to two principal tendencies: syntactical abbreviation and lexical opaqueness" (Cohn 94), but Cohn's analysis lacks a semiotic (in the traditional, not Kristevan sense) system that can fully account for diacritical or iconic (insofar as images or other graphical symbols break through the narration) indexes that a reader would recognize as a characterizing feature of the stream of consciousness in texts.

Although Frederick R. Karl only devotes a chapter of his *Modern and Modernism* to the stream of consciousness (which he calls “the epitome of modernism” [239]), his argument for a loosening of the restrictive definitions in order to “seek how the stream can be used as *both* technique and content, as both form and matter [. . .] as *situation and scene*” (232), offers a much more inclusive and intuitive way to approach texts of the interwar period. Karl’s concise definition of the stream of consciousness as “that area of expression which blurs boundaries between rational and irrational, logical and illogical” (232) echoes comments made by the first reviewers of the novels of Joyce and Woolf who recognized the trope when they saw it—with no need to consider levels of interior monologue or the difference between type and technique. While Karl does go on to refine Humphrey’s labels, he acknowledges that “the stream is rarely consistent,” and that his revision “suggests that the stream, like nearly every other mode of communication, is capable of such variations that in several of its aspects it bleeds over into other forms of narration: first and third person, for example, or narrated memory or pastness. The stream is not easily identified” (234). It should be noted that Karl’s focus is limited to writers who represent, for him, “the full flower of modernism” like Proust, Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner—not on popular manifestations of the stream of consciousness—which is why he can dismissively conclude that the trope represents “enclosure” and “retreat” from “the larger world” (232, 241); but his insistence on its variability and complexity opens up the possibility of approaching texts of the period without a *a priori* formal expectations. Accepting

Karl's more ambiguous definition of the stream of consciousness may seem evasive—as if it provides a convenient way to locate it anywhere and everywhere—but it is actually more authentic to the experience of readers who initially encountered modernist texts and had to learn the codes and signifiers of interiority as they first appeared in advertisements, the popular press and, of course, the latest fiction.

“Dot and Dash” Literature: The Stream of Consciousness Best-Seller

The best-selling novel of 1923 was Gertrude Atherton's tale of youth regained through endrocrinal surgery, *Black Oxen* (Hackett 127), and this is how it begins:

“Talk. Talk. Talk. . . . Good lines and no action . . . said all . . . not even promising first act . . . eighth failure and season more than half over . . . rather be a playwright and fail than a critic compelled to listen to has-beens and would-bes trying to put over bad plays . . . Oh, for just one more great first-night . . . if there's a spirit world why don't the ghosts of dead artists get together and inhibit bad playwrights from tormenting first-nighters? . . . Astral board of Immortals sitting in Unconscious tweaking strings until gobbets and sclerotics become gibbering idiots every time they put pen to paper? . . . Fewer first-nights but more joy . . . also joy of sending

producers back to cigar stands . . . Thank God, no longer a critic . . . don't need to come to first-nights unless I want . . . can't keep away . . . habit too strong . . . poor devil of a colyumnist [sic] must forage . . . why did I become a columnist? More money. Money! And I once a rubescent socialist . . . best parlor type . . . Lord! I wish some one would die and leave me a million!"

Clavering opened his weary eyes and glanced over the darkened auditorium [. . .]. (1)


While we come to learn who Lee Clavering is, where he comes from, and the kind of women he likes in the exposition that follows, it is nevertheless disarming to encounter such a "modernist" passage in a novel of such marked popular appeal. Not only was the contemporary consumer of mass-market fiction expected to recognize the codes of consciousness without any prefatory explanation, but also to do that which has come to define modernist reading practice: defer understanding and work through defamiliarization in order to construct the meaning of the text.

Without making too much of the opening of Atherton's novel, it must be noted that it not only calls into question the assumption that literary modernism hovered above the most popular fiction, but also the presumption that the bestselling fiction of the interwar period was so because it offered a palliative realism to a public resistant to stylistic experimentalism. Clive Bloom, in his study of twentieth-century popular fiction, argues that the bestseller "is the fiction that most becomes its period and which is most caught in its own age"

(15); unlike “art fiction,” which “highlights its style, delights in it and makes of style a fetish,” the bestseller “neutralises style, seems only interested in narrative, content and convention, and delights in making language invisible in order to tell a tale” (21). However privileged “content” is in *Black Oxen*, it is clear that it does not make language “invisible”; indeed, if it exemplifies “convention,” then it might be presumed that modernist techniques were, by 1923, becoming “conventional.” Atherton’s use of sentence fragments, spaced apart by ellipses, was already becoming a common stylistic feature in literature, as well as the language of advertising. In the interwar years, the ellipsis was as frequently employed in advertising copy to connote the “modern” and the stylish. In addition to the Gillette and Worthington’s advertisements, a less “monologic,” but still typical example is an advertisement for the Dunhill Vanity (fig. 7.), which appeared in *Vanity Fair*, with its coupling of a illustration of a “modern,” sleek, angular woman with willowy fingers applying make-up above copy that reads:

No more need one fumble about for rouge, powder, or the elusive lipstick . . . For here is a tiny vanity which ingeniously combines these three prime requisites to make-up . . . Simulating in appearance the well-know *briquet* it offers the same fascinating ease of use. A quick flip of the cap reveals a lipstick which may either be withdrawn or used in its stationary form . . . [. . .] . . . The cosmetics are of surpassing quality and may be obtained in the shades now in favor. Available at all smart stores. (19)

19




PRESENTING THE

DUNHILL VANITY

SISTER CREATION TO THE FAMOUS LIGHTER

*Beautify yourself as easily as
you would light a cigarette*

No more need one fumble about furrouge, powder or the elusive lipstick . . . For here is a tiny vanity which ingeniously combines these three prime requisites to make-up . . . Smoothing in appearance the well-known briquet it offers the same fascinating ease of use. A quick flick of the cap reveals a lip-



rich, which may either be withdrawn or used in its stationary form. . . . Within the dainty enclosure is a mirror and a single or double cigarette, as one prefers . . . The cosmetics are of surpassing quality and may be obtained in the shades now in favor.

The device may be removed from the case by pulling out the cigarette and the cap will be removed.

AVAILABLE AT THE SMART SHOP, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 65, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, 83, 85, 87, 89, 91, 93, 95, 97, 99, 101, 103, 105, 107, 109, 111, 113, 115, 117, 119, 121, 123, 125, 127, 129, 131, 133, 135, 137, 139, 141, 143, 145, 147, 149, 151, 153, 155, 157, 159, 161, 163, 165, 167, 169, 171, 173, 175, 177, 179, 181, 183, 185, 187, 189, 191, 193, 195, 197, 199, 201, 203, 205, 207, 209, 211, 213, 215, 217, 219, 221, 223, 225, 227, 229, 231, 233, 235, 237, 239, 241, 243, 245, 247, 249, 251, 253, 255, 257, 259, 261, 263, 265, 267, 269, 271, 273, 275, 277, 279, 281, 283, 285, 287, 289, 291, 293, 295, 297, 299, 301, 303, 305, 307, 309, 311, 313, 315, 317, 319, 321, 323, 325, 327, 329, 331, 333, 335, 337, 339, 341, 343, 345, 347, 349, 351, 353, 355, 357, 359, 361, 363, 365, 367, 369, 371, 373, 375, 377, 379, 381, 383, 385, 387, 389, 391, 393, 395, 397, 399, 401, 403, 405, 407, 409, 411, 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416

Even advertisements for fabrics presented typographical advertising copy that promoted “Modern clothes for modern men . . . comfortable, colorful, correct . . . no hint of the bizarre . . . but nevertheless modern . . .” (Strong-Hewat 106).

Atherton’s textual representation of the “psychological,” however, follows Dorothy Richardson’s use of elliptical breaks in *Pilgrimage* to suggest the stream of Miriam Henderson’s reporting (and what for Edel is her “belligerently feminine”) consciousness:

The West End street . . . grey buildings rising on either side,
angles sharp against the sky . . . softened angles of buildings
against other buildings . . . high moulded angles soft as crumb,
with deep undershadows . . . creepers fraying from balconies . . .
[. . .] Sounds of visible near things streaked and scored with
broken light as they moved, led off into untraced distant sounds .
. . chiming together . . . [. . .].

Flags of pavement flowing—smooth clean grey squares and
oblongs, faintly polished, shaping and drawing away—sliding
into each other . . . I am part of the dense smooth clean paving
stone. . . . (416)

Richardson, in her essay “On Punctuation,” credits H. G. Wells with adapting the “rows and rows of dots” from Sterne and Rabelais, who used them to signify hints and imply excisions, into a new form of punctuation that “became pauses for reflection, by the reader” and allowed for “the responsive beat of the reader’s own consciousness” (416). If Richardson’s defense of Wells’ method can be

taken as a defense of her own elliptical style, then the “pauses” on the page are intended to replicate not only Miriam’s consciousness—but the reader’s as well. The ellipses are not indicative of omissions (or repressions) but function like a poetic caesura to approximate breaks in the rhythm of thought and the reception of impressions.

Though Richardson’s novels never became bestsellers, her stylistic device inspired many imitations and became “fashionable” (it should be remembered that the *Interim* portion of Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* was serialized in the same issues of the *Little Review* that published the first chapters of *Ulysses*. As competing stream of consciousness narratives, Joyce’s novel emerged—thanks to the controversy it created—as the more popular title, but Richardson’s technique had already begun to be assimilated into and appropriated by the texts of mass culture). Cecil Headlam wrote of the ubiquity of the elliptical style in an amusingly curmudgeonly essay in 1925 entitled “Dot and Dash.” Blaming everything from the “alphabet of telegraphese” and Morse code for the stylistic trend, Headlam considers ellipses little more than interjectional fillers used by lazy writers

who strive most earnestly to express the inexpressible; who aim at putting in all the tones and half-tones of a portrait, and at suggesting, not only the spoken word, but the hesitance of speech, the barely formed thought, the half-suppressed utterance of an idea, the growth of an impulse of emotion. These are they who fall back most frequently upon the use of dots, just as an

ordinary Englishman in his armchair at the club subsides upon
grunts and “ers” . . . and “ahs” (372-73)

Headlam wryly notes that “for some years after the war there was an invasion of dots into the pages of fiction so overpowering that it gave the impression that modern prose was suffering from chronic asthma” (376). However sarcastic his tone, Headlam’s essay offers more compelling insights into the dialogism of modernist literary style and cultural change than any of the New Critically-influenced studies of the stream of consciousness (or, for that matter, Marxist critics like Lukács and Adorno). “Roused by the competition of the films,” Headlam suggests, “modern authors called upon dots to provide them with an equivalent of the cinema fade-out”; it is a bobbed style,” he concludes,

that came in with bobbed hair. Some have attributed this way of writing to the excessive use of cigarettes promoted by the war. Or was it due to the impression made upon minds none too stable by the electric advertisement signs which dot and dash the heights of Trafalgar Square and dazzle and depths of Piccadilly? There is, perhaps, something closely analogous in the style of the very modern novelist and that of the electric sign-writer. They are both so fussy, jerky, breathless, and over-emphatic. (376-77)

Headlam’s droll examples may be hard to accept without skepticism, but he is nevertheless pointing out the interrelationship between “very modern” style and mass culture, well before Fredric Jameson called for an investigation of the literary text as a “cultural artifact” made up of “a field of force in which the

dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended” as an “ideology of form” (*The Political Unconscious* 98). Moreover, to consider how a modernist trope like the stream of consciousness (however it may be typographically presented—dotted, dashed, italicized or altogether unpunctuated) both influenced and was influenced by advertising and the mass media—to see it as a variegated and culturally determined “ideology of form”—offers more historical insight than Jameson’s own reading of Joyce’s materialized, “autonom[ized]” language that he claims is “abstracted from the normal operations of human expression and communication [and] human meaning” (“Joyce or Proust?” 191). As Headlam observed in 1925, the “inexpressible,” elliptically represented in modernist works was anything but “autonomous” or “abstracted” from the realm of popular discourse: like the semiotic within the symbolic, it was inseparably intertwined with it.

Irrespective of its stylistic origins or variations, the stream of consciousness was not only a “type” or genre—it was also a stylistic or tropic device that appeared in ostensibly “realist” interwar narratives as well—and it may be due to Humphrey’s distinction of interior monologues from the “stream of consciousness novel” proper that surprising instances of “prespeech” subjectivity in popular fiction have passed with little or no critical recognition. Contemporary readers, however, seemed to recognize it when they saw it. If, to use Richard Johnson’s succinct formulation, “narratives or images always imply or construct a position or positions from which they are to be read or viewed”

(66), the constructed reader of Atherton's fiction, if not familiar with the novels of Dorothy Richardson, was able to recognize the narrative stream of consciousness as fragmentary, elliptical (in its typographical presentation but also in the sense that it suggests what it omitted or inaccessible to consciousness), and informed by Freudian psychoanalysis ("Astral board of Immortals sitting in Unconscious tweaking strings"). The popular success of *Black Oxen*—a fiction that evidently did "most becom[e] its period"—suggests that the general reader Atherton helped construct not only accepted a modernist technique like the stream of consciousness, but enjoyed it.

Although *Black Oxen*, which foregrounds the semiotic on its first page, is notable for the enormity of its success, it is by no means a singular example of the convergence of "high" modernism and bestselling "mass" fiction. J. P. McEvoy's novel *Show Girl* is an interesting example of how even a comedic narrative written to appeal to the widest audience, free of any "highbrow" pretensions, incorporated modernist literary form and style. The popularity of *Show Girl*—which sold out over forty thousand copies and went through six printings in 1928—is undoubtedly the reason it has received no scholarly attention (or any attention at all, since its initial publication), but it deserves to be rediscovered and given the same kind of consideration Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* has merited. Indeed, *Show Girl*, which was hailed in a one-page promotional advertisement for *The New York Herald Tribune* Sunday books section as "playing fast and Anita Loos with all best seller records" and described as "the most uproarious entertainment since gentleman began

preferring blondes" ("Why is *Show Girl* Making Whoopee Among the Best Sellers?" 20), is similar in its ironic treatment of its female protagonist, but it is the form of the novel which sets it apart. The narrative is, essentially, a collage: "the tale is told," the *Herald* advertisement explains, "through the medium of letters, telegrams, cables, dialogue-sketches, extracts from newspapers, telephone conversations. The thing carries itself forward with a breathless momentum"; the concluding copy notes that "*Show Girl* is listed on the best-seller lists as a novel. But it is really a revue, in book form, conceived, composed and directed by J. P. McEvoy" ("Why is *Show Girl* Making Whoopee Among the Best Sellers?" 20). The publisher's reluctance to classify this "novelty of form" is telling: in a move usually associated with discussions of postmodernist texts, the novel is presented as a cross-genre work that blurs the boundaries between the literary and the popular.

Show Girl marks the first appearance of Dixie Dugan (who would later appear in a sequel, two films, and a syndicated comic strip) and follows her through a failed attempt to become a Ziegfeld Follies dancer, to her stint as a nightclub performer, where she gets involved with a counterrevolutionary tango dancer and a Wall Street millionaire, gains notoriety in the scandalous attempted-murder plot that results, fakes her own kidnapping, and, finally, rises to fame as the star of a hit musical-comedy, *Get Your Girl*. For the most part, *Show Girl* might be considered a modern epistolary novel, but it is unique for its inclusion of images and typographical variations to signal changes in genre and narrative perspective. A series of pages, for example, present alternating

telegram communications between the characters, each with a reproduction of the postal or Western Union cablegram header, followed by unpunctuated upper-case typewriter font (fig. 8). When newspaper articles enter the narrative, they are presented in parallel columns of close, small print under upper-case headlines. Additionally, McEvoy presents some sections in the dialogic

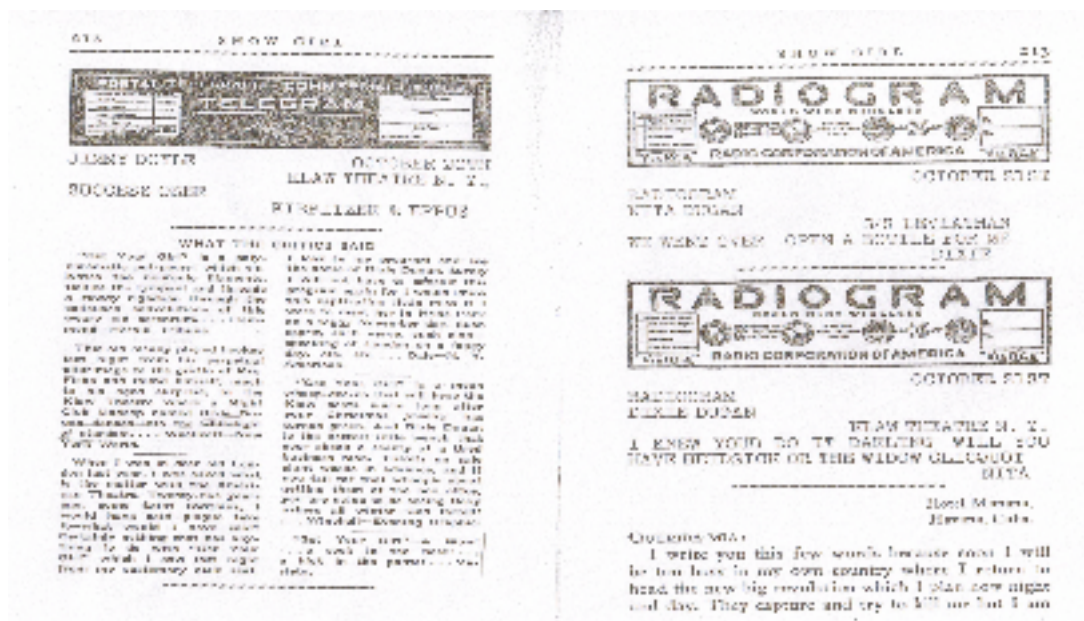


Fig. 8. Pages from J. P. McEvoy's *Show Girl*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1928. 212-13.

structure of dramatic form, others as screenplay “scenes”; at times, he depends on greeting cards, critical notices, and playbills to further the story. At one point—just before the opening of *Get Your Girl*—Dixie experiences a moment of “hysterical excitement” in her room (where her sister is sleeping) and McEvoy

uses the convention of the staggered ellipses to indicate her stream of consciousness:

Do you really think it's going to be all right? . . . Do you really? . . .
I'm so frightened. . . . Gee, I'm dead . . . If I could only sleep. . . .
Seven o'clock in the morning and rehearsing since eight last
night and there's a call for eleven o'clock. . . . Four hours sleep, if
I can sleep . . . [. . .] What's the use of my going to bed? . . . I can't
sleep. . . . If I only had a drink. . . . (132-33)

She continues, in this manner, to worry about the production and its challenges as she gets into bed. There, she thinks about Jimmy (the writer of *Get Your Girl*) until she falls asleep, and it seems that McEvoy is referencing (however flippantly) Molly Bloom's soliloquy at the end of *Ulysses*:

Gee, I'm dead. . . . Oh, boy, what a bed. . . . I'll just sleep like this.
. . . Take my slippers off . . . [. . .] Gee, the sun is shining in the
window . . . [. . .] What time is it anyway? . . . Can't you stop that
damn ocean outside? . . . I think I'll get up and go for a swim
Gee, I'm dead. . . . And I got to be at that theatre in a couple of
hours. . . . Jimmy's going to take me down there. . . . Said I
could eat breakfast with him at Childs. . . . I could eat a horse with
Jimmy. . . . Gee, he's a sweet kid. . . . Gee, I'm tired. . . . Jimmy . .
. Sweet boy . . . Sweet . . . (135)

However frivolous the plot of *Show Girl*, it is nevertheless a compelling example of the way modernist textual experimentalism informed even the most

accessible and widely-read literature. Arguably, any novel produced within the modern period lays claim to be called “modern” literature—and, since even the most realistic or genre-specific texts emerged in dialogic and intertextual relationship with “high” modernism and bear the traces of modernist influence (in varying degrees, to be sure)—but it is important to reconsider and test definitions of the modern at the level of the individual text to better understand the way this “subversive” or semiotic challenge to literary conventions was encoded in, and helped shape, popular discourse.

If “a key formal characteristic of the modernist work” is, as the most recent edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* explains, “its construction out of fragments,” if it is an “assemblage” that is “notable for what it omits—the explanations, interpretations, connections, summaries, and distancing that provide continuity, perspective, and security in traditional literature” it would be difficult not to see *Show Girl* as a “typical modernist work” (Baym 1078). “Compared with earlier writing,” the modern novel

will seem to begin arbitrarily, to advance without explanation, and to end without resolution, consisting of vivid segments juxtaposed without cushioning or integrating transitions. There will be shifts in perspective, voice, and tone. Its rhetoric will be understated, ironic. It will suggest rather than assert, making use of symbols and images instead of statements. Fragments will be drawn from the diverse areas of experience. (Baym 1079)

It is up to the reader to sort through the fragments and “this is why the reader of a modernist work is often said to participate in the actual work of making the poem or story” (Baym 1079). While the editors of the *Norton Anthology* clearly have novels like *As I Lay Dying* (which is included in the volume) and *The Sound and the Fury* in mind, they could just as well be describing *Show Girl*. Admittedly, navigating the series of telegrams, letters, telephone conversations, newspaper articles, and dramatic scenes which make up the novel is easier than piecing together the fragmented consciousnesses Faulkner presents in *As I Lay Dying*, but it is an “assemblage” nonetheless, and it does require the reader to participate in constructing the narrative. It may be too much to insist that *Show Girl* should be anthologized as an exemplary modern novel, but to read it against a novel like *As I Lay Dying* would certainly help demystify modernism and to discredit the “great divide” conceit.

Indeed, rather than deflate students with the promise that the “experience of reading [modernist literature] will be challenging and difficult” (1079), *Show Girl* could be given as evidence that not all modern texts are “difficult,” that engaging with fragments and constructing textual meaning was immensely appealing to the same interwar audience that had a mania for crossword puzzles, detective fiction, and deduction narratives like *The Baffle Book* (which, unfortunately, deserves more comment than can be provided here)—a parlor game/short story hybrid that offered crime stories like “The Mystery of the Murdered Physician” and “The Case of the Stolen Van Dyck,” along with maps and drawings that asked the reader to “consider all the circumstances of the

crime or mystery as stated in the text or as given in the chart or diagram or illustration, if one accompanies the problem,” and to “observe, deduce, [and] reason it out” (Wren and McKay 3). The editors of *The Norton Anthology*, however, by not acknowledging bestsellers like *Black Oxen* and *Show Girl*, incorrectly maintain that

serious literature between the two world wars found itself in a curious relationship with the culture at large. For if it was attacking the old-style idea of traditional literature, it felt itself attacked in turn by the ever-growing industry of popular literature. The reading audience in America was vast, but it preferred a kind of book quite different from that turned out by literary modernists. (Baym 1080)

This kind of claim not only serves to reinscribe the “autonomy” of modernism, but it also ignores modernist texts like Sherwood Anderson’s *Dark Laughter*, Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.*—even F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise*, each of which use the stream of consciousness trope and each of which became bestsellers that turned their authors into celebrities.

**“Fannie Hurst, best seller, making
her own contribution to the Stein
tradition”: *Lummox***

There may be no better challenge to the notion of the “curious relationship” of experimental literary modernism and the “industry of popular literature” than the stream of consciousness novels of Fannie Hurst—a bestselling author who has become synonymous with “middlebrow” popular fiction. Hurst’s career is a remarkable example of the way enormous popularity can conflict with canonicity: while now none of her novels are currently in print and she has been eclipsed by her one time secretary, Zora Neale Hurston, in the 1920s, Hurst was considered one of the most important “modernist” writers in America. In novels like *Appassionata*, *Mannequin* and, most of all, *Lummo*, Hurst developed her own stream of consciousness method which Heywood Broun, in his review for the *New York Herald*, noted was indebted to both Gertrude Stein and Dorothy Richardson, “and now we have Fannie Hurst,” he declared, “best seller, making her own contribution to the Stein tradition” (30). If she was, for a time, the most popular of modernists, she is certainly one of the least remembered. Virginia Woolf, in her essay, “American Fiction,” considered Hurst as important as Cather and intimates that Hurst, “whose aim it is to write a book off [her] own bat and no one else’s” (120) was a kindred modernist spirit; *Vanity Fair* included Hurst in its November, 1923 “Hall of Fame”—a running feature that also included Woolf, Carl Sandburg, Stein, and other exemplars of the modern “smart set”—“chiefly because, in *Lummo*, her new novel, she has transcended, in her portrayal of the American scene, anything she has before achieved” (77); and in a full-page promotion in the *New York Times*, Harper and Brothers, to underscore that *Lummo* was a critical, as well as a commercial

success, reproduced effusive English reviews like the following, from the *Observer*—which not only praises her stream of consciousness method, but actually places her above Richardson and Joyce:

This is not only the best novel we have had from America for at least a decade; it is one of the best novels in English we have read for years, and may easily, in the future, mark an epoch in our fiction as distinctively as did *Esther Waters*. Miss Hurst has taken the modern method, invented by Miss Richardson and developed since by many writers, some of far greater talent than the originator, and has made of it a beauty and wonder. Her great advantages over such authors as Mr. Lawrence or Mr. James Joyce are that she has an affection, a zest for life; and that we never suspect her of dramatizing herself. (“Fannie Hurst and the English Critics” BR19)

A less sanguine American reviewer for the *New York Times* criticized the “grammatical sins” of Hurst’s writing and blamed “advertising manners” for the lack of punctuation in modern novels—however, he does admit that she has “still done much that is fine; portrayed a notable character, etched in verbal mezzotint several types of New York people, tinged the commonplace with beauty and touched the deepest wells of human emotion” (BR5).

Stephanie Lewis Thompson, in one of the few academic studies of Hurst’s fiction—*Influencing America’s Tastes: Realism in the Works of Wharton, Cather, and Hurst*—contemplates the reason for Hurst’s “erasure from the

canon of American literature,” and notes that, what little critical attention Hurst has received “are in relation to ‘women’s issues,’ her place within the canon of Jewish writers, and her relationship with Zora Neale Hurston [. . .]. [S]he is [now] remembered as a writer of stories and novels that were turned into ‘women’s films’” (155). While she does point out that Hurst “did not denigrate the emerging narrative techniques we now deem modernist; in fact, she praised narrative experimentation and used a stream-of-consciousness technique in several of her fictions” (155), Thompson is much more interested in examining why Hurst turned to realism as her career developed—or, as she writes, why Hurst “rejected modernist aesthetics as a viable model for writing” (87). Since Thompson’s focus is on the realist texts produced by the authors in her study, she is not interested “in trying to redefine modernism so that I can classify Wharton, Cather, and Hurst as modernists” (87). This move to deny Hurst’s contribution to literary modernism, however, serves only to reinscribe the false binary between bestselling writers and “serious” experimental literature—and to further secure Hurst’s reputation as a “sob sister,” a writer known only for producing melodramatic “middlebrow” fiction.

Although little has been written about *Lummox* (and what has is usually a brief mention before a discussion of Hurst’s later fiction, like *Back Street*), it is an important example of the popular appeal of modernist technique. As Hurst’s biographer, Brooke Kroeger writes, *Lummox* “was a sensation, and reviewers gave Fannie the literary reception of her dreams for the emphatic survey of the life of a domestic servant” (92). The plot of the novel follows Bertha, a New

York born orphan who (inexplicably) speaks with a thick accent and, since no one knows “just what Baltic bloods flowed in sullen and alien rivers through Bertha’s veins” (1), she comes to represent the migration of the “old world” into the new. Raised in a sailor’s boarding house, without any education, Bertha seeks employment as a maid and the narrative follows her through a series of jobs where she faultlessly and selflessly serves wealthy families until she is either forced to leave or she is unjustly fired. *Lummox* is compelling, not only for its exposure of class conflict, but also for the way Hurst forces the reader to assume the perspective of Bertha—the inarticulate “other,” with her “alien rivers” of blood, who signifies the emergence of the semiotic into the symbolic.

Bertha’s first extended employment is with the Farley’s, wealthy residents of Gramercy Park, and, despite their condescending treatment, she perseveres because, we learn, she has a

horror of employment agencies. Shambles of sullen stock awaiting inspection. The lorgnette fusillade. The bitter shameless questionings, like an apple corer plunging down into the heart.

“What is that on your face? I hope it isn’t a rash. Do you expect every Thursday out? You bathe regularly, of course? You understand that my cook always helps with the housework on the maid’s day out. I’ve a half-grown daughter and cannot permit my help to entertain men in the kitchen. Newspapers are full of such

dreadful things. Would you mind having your things fumigated before you bring them to the house? Can't be too careful. . . . "
(*Lummox* 7).

The dehumanizing process of being selected for work carries with it the implication that servants like Bertha pose the threat of introducing the abject—disease, lewdness, vermin—into the tightly regulated domestic sphere. In this example of how working women are “othered” by those who hire them, Hurst manages to expose the forces of reification as she begins to allow the reader to enter into Bertha’s subjective consciousness.

Near the end of her time working for the Farley’s, she begins to take an interest in their poet son, Rollo. As she dusts his study one day, the barely literate Bertha reads one of the poems he has left on his desk and falls into a kind of rapture:

Short lines leaving much of the paper white. Lines that rocked softly like a boat with a lateen sail. Rhythm. “Love. Rove.”
“Pagan. Raven.” “Lyre. Desire.”

Flash. Flash. Flash. A plunging opal horse and a jade terrific lion and a lapis lazuli centaur, riding round and round again into alternate view on the merry-go-round.

She has dusted the wide-margined paper with the click of flame color through the words. (*Lummox* 9)

Throughout the novel, Bertha is overcome by rhythm and music: although she cannot express her own “locked up gargoyles of thoughts [. . .] for which she

had no words" (*Lummox* 8), when she encounters the semiotic that underlies communication, the sense of freedom she feels is replicated on the page in the form of repetitions, fragment and single-word sentences. Bertha's sensitivity to the materiality of language (as evidenced here by her almost synesthesiac reaction to poetic sound over sense, and her attention to textuality: she notices the appearance of the words on the page, as well as the way her feather duster flickers "through" them as if they are palpable objects) is replicated through Hurst's peculiar adaptation of the stream of consciousness trope.

Bertha, as Hurst has created her, is hardly communicative (the *New York Times* review observed that "through more than three hundred pages [. . .] Bertha scarcely opens her mouth save for a clumsy "yah" ["Fannie Hurst Portrays a New York 'Lummox'" BR5]). She is much more aligned with what Kristeva calls the *chora*, or the semiotic position anterior to the acquisition of speech. According to Kristeva,

The *chora* is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e., it is not a sign) [. . .]. Neither model or copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and this specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm [. . .]. The *chora* is a modality of signifi-ance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the disposition between real and symbolic. (*Revolution* 26)

The *chora*, then, is literally "prespeech" consciousness, formed in utero and privileged before the Oedipalization, before the mirror-stage that inaugurates

the subject into language. “The mother’s body,” Kristeva writes, “is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*” (*Revolution* 27). That the *chora* is associated with the maternal is significant, because shortly after Bertha’s poetry-dusting episode, a drunken Rollo forces himself on her, she becomes pregnant and, before she can confront him with the news, she learns that he is engaged to be married.

Despite the fact that his night with Bertha inspired him to write his best poem—the book-length *The Cathedral Under the Sea*—he pays her no further attention and she leaves the Farley’s rather than create a scandal, but not before she hears him read the poem to his fiancée:

Slow oxen words plowing up secrets of the soil. Gleaming
submarine words. Words out of jeweled sands. Heavy words
that thundered into wisdom. The strange wisdom of the silence
that stood stock still. The hexameter of the wide, white feet that
the earth sucked unto herself in fond little marshes, as they ran
through the forests surrounding the Cathedral Under the Sea.
The song that was locked in a heart and hurt there. Rhythm.
The fandango of sound. The saga of the silence of Bertha—there
behind the swinging doors, hearing herself bleed into words.

(*Lummox* 20)

Again, Bertha’s reaction to poetic language is to be carried away by its sound and rhythm—there is no real indication of the literal content of poem, only the

sensory impressions the “submarine words” evoke in her. In her stream of consciousness, Bertha translates the “hexameter” into actual “feet” she feels pressing into mud (an activity she enjoys). She recognizes that the poem is about her, and its mournful beauty, it seems, creates in her the sensation that her blood has both created the words and that she feels the words in her blood. In these moments, Hurst seems to anticipate Kristeva’s arguments about the semiotic. In “Stabat Mater,” Kristeva writes that the Mother’s bodily fluids—blood, milk and tears

are metaphors of non-speech, of a “semiotics” that linguistic communication does not account for. The Mother and her attributes, evoking sorrowful humanity, thus become representatives of a “return of the repressed.” They re-establish what is non-verbal and show up as the receptacle of a signifying disposition that is closer to so-called primary processes. (174)

Bertha works as a charwoman through her pregnancy and, soon after she gives birth to a son, she places him up for adoption. When she hears the word “mother,” afterward, it “could twist her and make her want to bite at the cove of her arm” because that is where “the small head had lain” (*Lummox* 71, 62).

Bertha, who never knew her own mother, and who never meets her own child (she watches him from afar), is nevertheless presented as a maternal archetype. As a contemporary critic noted, *Lummox* is “an epic of the mother instinct” (“Fannie Hurst’s Greatest Book” BR23), and Abe C. Rabitz, in one of the only book-length critical studies of Hurst, calls the novel “the chronicle of eternal or

Earth Mother" (107). To use Kristeva's argument, Bertha (a name which combines both "birth" and "earth") is not placed "in process/on trial" by the semiotic—she *represents* it. In one of the clearest examples of Bertha as "Earth Mother," she attends a picnic where she sits and removes her shoes to sink her feet in the wet ground:

Squunch. Squunch. Squirm of the pouring soil up between her churning, spatulate toes. She could feel it with the very pit of her. Warm. Black. Close. Her mysterious friend, the soil, whispering to her with those tight eager lips—it was difficult not to throw out her arms and shout—tear open her bulk of blouse where it cluttered her breast and shout—the curling, winding, whispering, kissing soil hugging her with its eager lips—she wanted to run—to run back barefoot along the plushy fields. (73)

In this ecstatic, sexualized moment, she penetrates and is embraced by the earth; her *jouissance* materialized on the page as the movement from fragmented sentences to a dashed breathlessness (As an indication of *Lummox's* popularity, its style was parodied by Christopher Ward. This passage, in particular, is singled out in "Stummox by Fannie Wurst": "Piggly wiggly. Rhythmically rippling toes. And talk. Deaf and dumb toe alphabet. She had no other words. Dumb Dora. Tongue-tied—but tongue-toed. With her toes she made letters. Words [. . .]. Phalangean poetry. Iambic pintoemeter" [1-2]). The scene suggests, not only merging, but also a return to the archaic or

primordial which, according to Kristeva, is the time before speech and the individuation that language produces.

After Bertha gains and loses more jobs—she is forced out of one couple's home because she is made to mediate between them, another because the kind old woman who hires her dies (with Bertha's aid), and Bertha leaves rather than to have to endure working for the old woman's hateful daughter-in-law, and yet another, after years of selfless devotion, when she is wrongfully accused of stealing from the family. Aging and forced to return to the employment agency, she accepts random jobs and daily charwoman work. At one point, she works as a coatroom attendant in a jazz club and, as she has before when she hears rhythm, she experiences an ecstatic moment—which Hurst presents by foregrounding the text. What is surprising, however, is that the pronoun shifts at this moment:

You leaped! It was the first crash of flesh-shuddering music [. . .]
A contortion ran along the cloakroom, as if everyone had moved
on little running muscles and yet not advanced. You shivered
almost ecstatically at that. Eyelids. The white flash of them
lowering. Sudden slitted eyes. Insouciance of the docked heads.
A tree shake through the cloakroom. Only it did not begin at the
heart. It lay in the flesh. The shivering, shimmering flesh [. . .].

That gelatinous room. It nauseated [. . .]. It made you a little
sick, the motionless motion. (*Lummo* 297)

A similar semiotic moment occurs later in the novel. After Bertha learns that her ticket and watches him, pridefully. As soon as he starts playing, Bertha swoons and the paragraphs give way to bars of music (fig. 9).

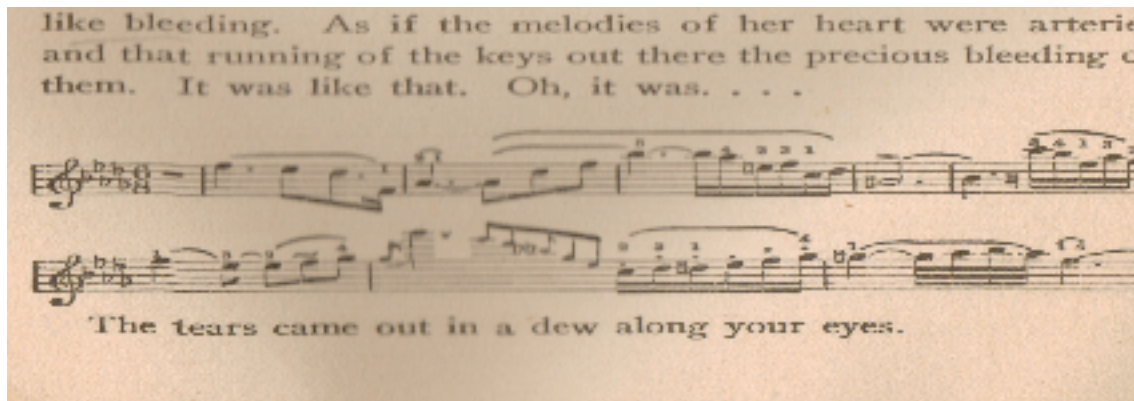


Fig. 9. Musical bars in Fannie Hurst's *LummoX*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923. 308.

"You could feel the floor of sand moving out subtly from under your feet," Hurst writes, and "the tears came out in a dew along your eyes" (*LummoX* 309).

When he reaches the crescendo, Bertha feels herself fully expressed for the first time:

It stepped down the keys in heartbeats. You could scarcely keep back. You knew that cry. It had lain in your heart for so long. There is was on the outside of yourself, strewn along the keys [. . .]. The bleeding out of all the little inner turmoils. The dammed-up ecstasies. The music of the chimes goldily. The glad releases. The rilling beauty [. . .]. To be pinioned there against the wall of

that afternoon with your hands caught up against your breast and
the arteries of your heart uncocked and flowing [. . .]. (309)

Thompson reads this pronoun slippage as a narrative intrusion: “this shift joltingly reminds us,” she argues, “that Bertha is being ‘written’ in this novel not only be her poet-lover but also by Hurst herself. There is a narrator shaping her thoughts for her and us, the ‘you’ a reminder that undercuts the realism of Bertha’s situation and emphasizes that her plight is an artistic creation, not a social problem needing a practical remedy” (170).

Because her focus is on Hurst’s later socialist realist texts, Thompson needs to fault Hurst’s modernist experimentalism in order to dismiss the way *Lummox* does indeed expose the “social problem” of working class women. Arguably, Hurst intends the pronoun shifts to be “jolting”: if we read with the grain of the text, it is clear that Hurst does not want to assert narrative omniscience, but to force the reader into Bertha’s subject position. The rhetorical turn from “Bertha” to “you” suggests that Hurst want to blur the boundaries between the reader and the character’s consciousness. If Thompson finds Hurst’s use of “you” ineffective or alienating, it is nevertheless an attempt to make the reader empathize with Bertha—to suture us into the narrative.

In Hurst’s autobiography, *Anatomy of Me*, she notes that *Lummox*—which she names as the favorite of her novels—was inspired by witnessing immigrant working women and she claims this inspired her to write with a “new social consciousness” (277). She explains that

One day, while *Lummox* was only a faint prick against my mind, I wandered into a dark basement of very east Fourteenth Street where two women, obviously Slavic, sat in the open doorway around a large carton filled with buttons of multifarious shapes and colours. Picked up by the handful, they were just a mass. But selected separately, each one claimed its identity [. . .]. In like manner, I had learned—subconsciously, I suppose—to sort faces. Faces in the crowd were no longer just faces melting like wax into one another. They had separateness.

It was out of this milling world of people with no faces in particular, no identity in particular, that my *Lummox* began to take heavy shape [. . .]. She became a composite of many soils, of many climates, of many lineages [. . .]. In a way, *Lummox* symbolized my complete breakthrough [. . .] from the circumscribed world in which I had been reared into a new social consciousness. (*Anatomy of Me* 277)

Hurst's story of the inspiration for *Lummox* is, like the novel itself, a story about learning to acknowledge the "other": the ethnic "other" who Hurst uses to define her project and her "breakthrough," as well as the "Other": the unconscious, the semiotic, which threatens identity and signification. The metaphor mass of buttons and melting wax, which here stand for merging and the lack of identity are contrasted with the notion of separateness or individuation. Interestingly, Bertha evolves from having "no identity in

particular” to being a “composite,” like the carton of buttons she is “just a mass”—a “heavy shape”—that represents the repressed (culturally and psychoanalytically), the “prespeech,” the semiotic.

That Hurst claims the novel represents her “new social consciousness” suggests, not only that the content of her novel is informed by her understanding of Marxism and the injustices that working class women in particular have to endure, but the development of her narrative technique is also the product of this “breakthrough.” (Hurst tells an interesting anecdote about meeting Trotsky in Russia, who was such an admirer of *Lummox* that he recited a large portion of it, from memory, for her amusement [*Anatomy of Me* 297].) Hurst’s modernism, then, is anything but autonomous or opposed to the social. Her stream of “social” consciousness invites the reader to not only witness Bertha’s life, but to assume her point of view—to merge with her and her consciousness. At one point in the novel, one of the maids who works with Bertha (and who later becomes a prostitute) voices what could be taken as a defense for the aesthetic of *Lummox*:

“We can’t tell the truth about the kitchen side of the door, because we ain’t got the voice of organization [. . .]. There’s nobody to get up and explain for us [. . .]. We ain’t got the voice or the language. Nobody writes pieces or prints articles about us from our side of the fence. We’re not interesting. Who wants to see a show about a servant?” (*Lummox* 220)

Hurst not only gives servants a “voice” (however inarticulate it may be) and not only presents “the kitchen side of the door,” she works to insinuate the reader into the consciousness of the “other” and to adapt to this new perspective. Hurst, arguably, desires the reader to accept her “new social consciousness” by accepting Bertha’s.

The plot of *Lummox* concludes with Bertha being asked, by the immigrant widower Meyerbogen, who owns the dingy bakery where she stops for bread one day, to work for him and help him with his four children. Bertha finally finds a place, as she gets the shop in order and cares for the family, where she is valued and contented. More surprising than the happy ending, however, are the illustrations Hurst includes in the final pages. On Bertha’s first visit to the bakery, she notices a chalkboard with a child’s drawing of the Meyerbogen family. After she has worked and resided with them for a time, she discovers that a sketch of her has been added to the drawing (fig. 10). Sentimentalism aside, it is interesting that one of the final images the reader has of Bertha is just that—an image.

While Bertha has represented the pre- or trans-verbal throughout the novel, in its conclusion, she is presented as an illustration. In the same way that she sees words as material objects, Bertha, by the end of *Lummox*, is turned into a material object for the reader. The drawing is still “symbolic” and representational (it does “signify” the family and Bertha), yet it literally interrupts the narrative in order to privilege the graphic over the linguistic. Hurst, on the

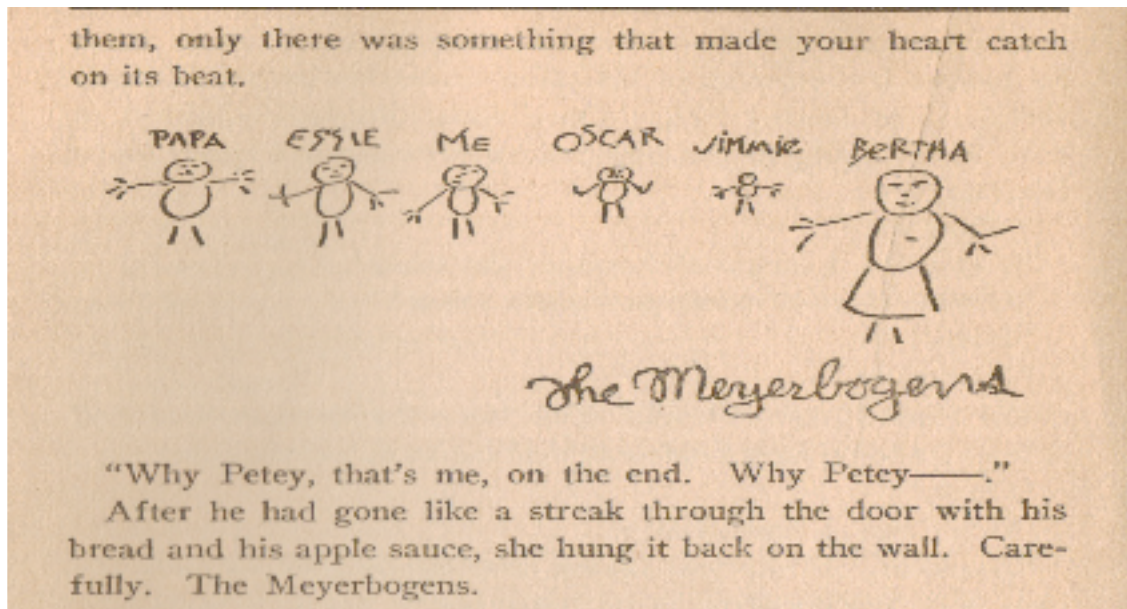


Fig. 10. Drawing of Bertha in Fannie Hurst's *Lummo*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923. 328.

level of the page, "does not suppress the semiotic *chora* but instead raises the *chora* to the status of a signifier" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 57): Bertha, as a *chora* analogue, is finally and fully "revealed" as that which cannot be expressed through the linguistic. Hurst's use of images (like Faulkner's in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*) suggests the narrative has approached the limits of language—where the abstract signification of the symbolic is rejected for the immediate, the iconic, that which language cannot entirely reveal: the semiotic.

***Strange Interlude*: Eugene**

O'Neill's "Great Thinkie"

There is no better example of the widespread popularity of the stream of consciousness in the interwar years than *Strange Interlude*, dubbed by *Life* as "Gene O'Neill's great thinkie" ("Neighborhood News: Chicago" 25). The long play, which featured O'Neill's modernization of the soliloquy as the expression of the character's unspoken and preconscious thoughts, was the most successful of O'Neill's career. Strange indeed is how parenthetically *Strange Interlude* is treated by scholars—if it is mentioned at all. O'Neill's play, more than any other "modernist" literary text, was embraced by a mass audience, and it therefore merits consideration (indeed, the lack of critical attention the play has received has served only to uphold the specious "great divide" argument): both for what its popularity suggests about the reception of the modernist stream of consciousness, and for the way the text itself dramatizes the conflict between the semiotic and the symbolic.

While it may be surprising that a play which foregrounded the stream of consciousness trope became a popular entertainment, it was no less surprising to O'Neill and the producers of the play. Doris Alexander, in her study of O'Neill's career, *Eugene O'Neill's Creative Struggle*, explains that *Strange Interlude* opened on January 30, 1928 at a small venue, and the Theatre Guild assumed an average run of a couple of months; "to their amazement," however, "it became a triumph, with almost universally brilliant reviews [. . .]. They had

standees at all performances as late as April. 'That trends on fanaticism, it seems to me,' said O'Neill when he heard about it. 'Myself, I wouldn't stand up [four and a half] hours to see the original production of the Crucifixion!'" (125). After playing for over a year, the Guild "had two traveling companies playing to crowded houses on the road" (Alexander 126). The length of the play was no doubt part of its attraction (as Otis W. Winchester points out, "the performance began at five-thirty in the afternoon and recessed at a quarter to eight, for dinner, and resumed at nine for slightly more than two hours" [43]) and cause for many more quips in addition to O'Neill's own. The *New York Daily News* reported that, when a comedian was asked how he liked *Strange Interlude*, he replied, "I enjoyed every day of it!" ("Lengthy" 31). It is not incidental to the argument that modernism was inseparable from mass culture to note that, when the play was banned by censors in Boston for its mentions of sex and abortion, and was relegated to the outskirts, too far away from restaurants (who were by then catering to the *Strange Interlude* crowds), the audiences, during the dinner intermission, gravitated to Howard Johnson's local ice-cream shop and helped it become a national franchise ("Twenty-Eight Flavors Head West" 71).

The play was not only successful in performance: it was quickly published in book form and became one of the best-selling plays of all time. As Walker Gilmer writes, in his biography of O'Neill's publisher, Horace Liveright, "when O'Neill made the national best-seller lists [. . .] with the appearance of *Strange Interlude*, both author and publisher were surprised. That this nine-act drama became a national success was the result of O'Neill's talent, the extensive

promotional treatment Liveright gave the work, and the popular appeal the play had for an audience which both of them had developed" (176-77). *Strange Interlude* was one of the top-five bestselling titles of 1928 (Hackett 137), it went on to become a Book-of-the-Month Club selection (despite Radway's claim that literary modernism was absent from the list of books offered) with its featured inclusion in the incentive *Nine Plays* by O'Neill collection ("*Nine Plays* by Eugene O'Neill Free for Your Library" BR24), and was "to become the best selling play of the Twenties and one of the most popular dramas in American history" (Gilmer 179).

As sensational as its subject matter was to contemporary audiences, who were no doubt drawn to the play because of its censorship in Boston, it was O'Neill's stylistic method and presentation of the "prespeech level" of consciousness (on stage and on the page) that garnered the most attention. The editor of O'Neill's working notebooks, Virginia Floyd, explains that the "stream-of-consciousness asides" followed his reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* in 1925, and he laid out his idea for the "method" in the following entry:

Start with soliloquy—perhaps have the whole play nothing but a thinking aloud (or this entrance for another play—anyway the thinking aloud being more important than the actual talking—speech breaking through thought as a random process of concealment, speech inconsequential or imperfectly expressing the thought behind—all done with the most drastic

logic and economy and simplicity of words—[. . .] Carrying the method to an extreme—one sees their lips move as they talk to one another but there is no sound—only their thinking is aloud. (qtd. in Floyd 74)

Interestingly, O'Neill's own description of the method reads like an example of the stream of consciousness technique, with the dashes replaced by "dots," that he would come to use in the construction of the "asides" in *Strange Interlude*. The convention of the elliptical fragment—already used in advertising and fiction—created a nevertheless distinctive enough stylistic mannerism that it became widely parodied. In "Strange Interview with Mr. O'Neill," *Vanity Fair* columnist John Riddell presents a dialogue between O'Neill and his "Inner Voice," which tells him, "here I am swimming around in the stream of your subconscious, without water-wings, and I know more about what you're doing than you do yourself" and "Whoops! . . . What funny things are beginning to float past me now, in the dim and troubled stream of Mr. O'Neill's subconscious . . . Funny lavender things, with horns . . . Why, they're thoughts . . . I'll be a son-of-a-gun, they're thoughts of *me* . . . (86). *Life* presented O'Neill's elliptical style in its send-up of dance marathons which includes a pause for a "Strange Interlude":

It's five o'clock in the morning, we've danced the whole week through . . . the blaring jazz dies out, the musicians straggle off the platform . . . staggering couples stumble into red and white striped tents and disappear . . . three hours' rest! . . . [. . .] the vast

white cavern is deserted . . . the goof god slowly clambers down
from his dizzy pedestal . . . peace on earth!" ("New York Life" 18).

Advertising had long been using the ellipsis, but after *Strange Interlude*, the style became even more pervasive and coded as "psychological," as one advertisement for Piel's beer—which seems to have O'Neill's audience in mind—suggests (fig. 11). The advertisement features an illustration of a couple in evening wear, standing uncomfortably under glaring lights during an intermission and, because it appears to be indebted to the literary modernism of *Strange Interlude*, the copy is worth quoting:

Bad moments . . . You know the entr'acte . . . When you troop out
of the theatre onto the sidewalk with the rest of the audience . . .
Blinking slightly . . . Makeup looks pretty seasick under the arc-
lights . . . The inevitable cigarette . . . The inevitable "How do you
like the play?" . . . You stand there . . . Everybody else stands there .
. . . You keep on standing there, barely suppressing a yawn . . . It's
a bad moment . . . Don't be such a sheep . . . Take your lady
firmly by the hand . . . Lead her across the street to the bright
little shop there . . . You have just time for a bottle of Piel's apiece .
. . . When you finish, the sheep will have herded back into the
theatre . . . Whereupon you trip neatly down the aisle, dropping
into your seats at the psychological moment when the curtain
rises . . . The entr'acte makes sense that way. (33)

32



BAD MOMENTS . . .

Entr'acte

YOU know the entr'acte . . . When you troop out of the theatre onto the sidewalk with the rest of the audience . . . Blinking slightly . . . Makeup looks pretty smudged under the arc lights . . . The inevitable cigarette . . . The inevitable "How do you like the play?" . . . You stand there . . . Everybody else stands there . . . You keep on standing there, barely suppressing a yawn . . . It's a bad moment . . . Don't be

such a sheep . . . Take your lady firmly by the hand . . . Lead her across the street to the bright little shop there . . . You have just time for a bottle of Piel's apiere . . . When you finish, the sheep will have herded back into the theatre . . . Whereupon you trip nautily down the side, dropping into your seat at the psychological moment when the curtain rises . . . The entr'acte makes sense that way.




On sale at most of the famous clubs, hotels, restaurants and at the better grocer

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Fig. 11. Piel's "Bad Moments." Advertisement. *New Yorker* 13 Jan. 1934: 33.

The advertisement turns the elliptical “aside” into an intimation of confidence, and the consumer, who is able to recognize the “psychological moment,” is set apart from the “sheep” who cannot think for themselves. Piel’s associates itself with the style of *Strange Interlude* so that the consumer associates the interludes between the acts with Piel’s.

On stage, comedy revues were featuring *Strange Interlude* skits which, as the *New York Times* reported, “promise[d] to be regular features of every revue produced during the coming season,” with one “more than ordinarily funny in its depiction of characters who say their lines but act out their thoughts” (“White’s ‘Scandals’ Has Funny Skits” 19). Even before the 1932 film adaptation, featuring Norma Shearer and Clark Gable, debuted with what one advertisement called “a new and revolutionary development in talking pictures[:] you *hear* the secret thoughts of each character!” (“What has M.G.M. Done Now?” 13) the Marx Brothers were depending on their audience’s familiarity with O’Neill’s play for Groucho’s parody in *Animal Crackers*, wherein he steps in front of a pair of women after he declares, “pardon me while I have a strange interlude” and, in mock-serious monotone, claims that, as Eugene O’Neill, he would be able to reveal “what I really think of you two.”

The Marx Brothers’ caricature of the actor speaking with a slightly modulated voice while the others on stage held their positions seems to be more faithful to the way *Strange Interlude* was actually performed than is the M.G.M. film, with its voice-overs which play over close-ups of the actor’s faces. According to Ronald H. Wainscott, in his *Staging O’Neill*, the first director,

Philip Moeller, who labored over how to present the asides, decided to have all but the speaking actor pause. The effect he was after was for the play “to seem suddenly to stop and, at the same time, not to stop” (qtd. in Waincott 234):

Moeller tried to avoid severe, dynamic halts which would call attention to themselves in their abruptness. He thought of them as momentary lulls in which the secret thoughts could unobtrusively emerge [. . .]. Moeller furthermore heightened the sense of arrested motion by sometimes interrupting small movements and gestures, which were completed when normal dialogue resumed. (235)

While the effect was generally considered successful, it seemed “wooden” to *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson, who called O’Neill’s “method” a “fusion of relevant and irrelevant information” with “its artificial wording, its pungency and its general resemblance to a Fannie Hurst novel” (107). Gilbert Seldes pointed out that the asides corresponded with the interior monologue, the stream of consciousness, as it is used by contemporary novelists” but that they tended to be “frequently unnecessary” and overused by O’Neill (348). While both Atkinson and Seldes compared the play to contemporary fiction, Dudley Nichols—whose review of the published edition was reproduced in Boni and Liveright’s promotional advertisements—went so far as declare *Strange Interlude* a hybrid genre: it is *both* a “great play and a great novel[;]” with “its amazing asides, [it] brings to the drama a psychological fourth dimension attained previously only in the novel,” yet it “reads with the intensity

and directness few novels in literature have ever achieved" (*"Strange Interlude: Have We At Last the Great American Novel?"* 21). Nichols' review must have caused some confusion, because Boni and Liveright had to issue a follow-up advertisement with the header "An Explanation," clarifying that "it is of course a drama, but Mr. O'Neill's use of the aside, to express the hidden thoughts and feelings impossible to convey in dialogue, has added a psychological fullness to the drama which gives it the quality of a novel" (*"Strange Interlude: An Explanation"* 19).

It would be easy to account for *Strange Interlude's* success by focusing on its publicity (which includes not only advertisements but also the Pulitzer O'Neill received for the play), its purported salacious content, and the legal hearings for its "immorality" that almost always foretell an enthusiastic popular response (qtd. in Alexander 126), but it is clear that O'Neill's "method"—his adaptation of the stream of consciousness—was central to its appeal. Joel Pfister, who devotes surprisingly little time to *Strange Interlude* (it does not even merit its own chapter) in his study *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse*, dismissively notes that "the sensational box office and publishing success of the boldly experimental *Strange Interlude* can be attributed in part to the fact that pop psychology played a key role—along with the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg—in setting the stage for O'Neill's staging of modernist depth" (64) and, he writes,

my perspective is in alignment with that of Eric Bentley, who in 1962 argued that O'Neill had become the principal dramatist of

middlebrow consumers to whom ‘psychologism’ appealed, an audience that wanted their melodramas and soap operas (in my own terminology) written and staged to seem *deep*. It was the pop psychological dimension of *Strange Interlude* that made its pop modernism commercially viable” (*Staging Depth* 64).

Pfister deftly manages to discount the play’s “middlebrow” audiences as well as its “deep” modernist pretensions. While Pfister is indeed an adept literary historian, his view of *Strange Interlude* in particular as a popular text sullied by its modernism is essentially a contribution to the “great divide” claim; had O’Neill’s modernism been less appealing, less “pop,” it presumably would be less “middlebrow.” Neither “highbrow” fish nor “lowbrow” fowl, its success seems to be enough reason for Pfister to disregard it as little more than a “soap opera.” It is Pfister’s unforgiving view of the interwar middle-classes and their professional aspirations that is most responsible for his rejection of “deep” literature like *Strange Interlude*.

Like Jameson’s claims about modernism, Pfister’s argument depends on the notion of a homogenous interwar consumer—“white collar professionals and managers with a compensatory belief in and often sexy fascination with its own ‘psychological’ significance and individualism” (“Glamorizing the Psychological” 174). Mary Poovey’s understanding of Victorian “middle-class ideology” as being “both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of opposite formulations” (3) seems no less fitting a description of

interwar middle-class subjectivity (or, for that matter, current middle-class subjectivity), and offers a richer way to consider the subject of modernism. “Individual subjects,” Poovey reminds us, “are material in the ever elusive last instance” and that “the material and economic relations of production can only make themselves known through representations” (17). Rather than try to understand the motivations of the individual subject who popularized *Strange Interlude*, then, it may be more revealing to look at the way *Strange Interlude* popularized subjectivity.

The play is indeed expansive (the timespan of the plot is over twenty years). The central figure is Nina Leeds, who is grieving over the death of Gordon Shaw, an aviator who died at the end of the War and who, we learn, was dissuaded from marrying her before he enlisted by Nina’s father. Nina, to appease her guilty conscience at having denied Gordon, becomes a nurse and offers sexual comfort to the wounded soldiers in her care. Made to feel only worse, she returns home, nearly hysterical, after her father dies, with Ned Darrell—one of the doctors from the hospital where she worked—and his earnest friend Sam Evans. Convinced that marriage would help settle Nina’s nerves, Darrell persuades her to marry Evans, she conceives a child with him, and they go to meet his mother—who confides in Nina that insanity runs in the Evans’ family and that her child must be aborted. To ensure that this does not ruin Evans, his mother urges Nina to take a lover and never reveal the family secret to him. She and Darrell have an affair which produces a son (who Nina names Gordon), which Sam assumes is his. Heartened by fatherhood, Sam

becomes wealthy in the advertising business, Nina and Darrell's love fades, their child, Gordon, "instinctively" hates Darrell, who is cast as an Oedipal rival. Finally, after Sam dies of a heart attack, the collegiate Gordon, engaged, gives his mother and Darrell his blessing to marry, not knowing that their relationship has been over for years. Throughout the play, Charles Marsden—a family friend of Nina's and a successful novelist—serves as a kind of narrator, commenting on Nina and loving her from afar. In the last scene, Marsden and Nina agree to be married, since they have "passed beyond desire" and might live peacefully, sexlessly together (*SI* 255; act 9).

From this summary, it may be noticed that the plot is structured around sanity and secrets: that order is maintained by keeping the truth hidden. The form of the play, with its asides—which are "more important than the actual talking," to use O'Neill's words—mirrors the content, but foregrounds the "secrets" and repressed urges of each character that threaten to shatter their social order. In Kristevan terms, *Strange Interlude* dramatizes the dialectic between the repressed semiotic—the "other" to spoken communication in the world of the play—and the symbolic.

No sooner does the play begin than Marsden, waiting in Nina's father's library, begins thinking of his first sexual experience (the stage direction establishes the convention that signifies the aside: "his voice take on a monotonous musing quality, his eyes stare idly at his drifting thoughts" [*SI* 70; act 1]):

Ugh! . . . always that memory! . . . why can't I ever forget? . . . as sickeningly clear as it it were yesterday . . . prep school . . . Easter vacation . . . Fatty Boggs and Jack Frazer . . . that house of cheap vice . . . one dollar! . . . why did I go? . . . Jack the dead game sport . . . how I admired him! . . . afraid of his taunts . . . he pointed to the Italian girl . . . "Take her!" . . . daring me . . . I went . . . miserably frightened . . . what a pig she was! . . . pretty vicious face under caked powder and rouge . . . surly and contemptuous . . . lumpy body . . . [. . .] "What you gawkin' about? Git a move on, kid" . . . kid! . . . I was only a kid! . . . sixteen . . . test of manhood . . . [. . .] back at the hotel I waited till they were asleep . . . then sobbed . . . thinking of Mother . . . feeling I had defiled her . . . and myself . . . forever! . . . (SI 71-2; act 1)

However heavy-handed the Freudianism may be to current readers, O'Neill essentially asks his audience (or reader) to assume the role of the analyst. While he does not specify that Marsden suffers from his inability to complete the Oedipus complex, he does use this aside to establish Marsden as sexually stilted and prudish—or as Darrell will call him later, an "old sissy" (SI 203; act 7). Soon after his guilty "admission" about the prostitute, O'Neill has Marsden—the most repressed character in the play—denounce psychoanalysis; an ironic moment that allows the audience to understand (again, like an analyst) Marsden in a way denied to himself: "Herr Freud!" he thinks, "punishment to fit his crimes, be forced to listen eternally during breakfast while innumerable plain

ones tell him dreams about snakes . . . pah, what an easy cure-all! . . . sex the philosopher's stone . . . 'O Oedipus, O my kind! The world is adopting you! . . .'" (SI 98; act two).

Marsden serves as the traditional, anti-modernist foil in the play. He makes a point of reminding Nina that, as a writer, he is "a stickler for these little literary conventions" (SI 87; act 1) and admits to himself: "my novels . . . not of cosmic importance, hardly . . . but there is a public to cherish them, evidently . . . and I can write! . . . more than one can say of these modern sex yahoos! . . ." (SI 71; act 1). When Darrell meets him for the first time, he thinks Marsden's "novels just well-written surface . . . no depth, no digging underneath . . . why? has the talent but doesn't dare . . . afraid he'll meet himself somewhere . . . one of those poor devils who spend their lives trying not to discover which sex they belong to! . . ." (SI 98; act 2). While he does indeed possess a "prespeech" or "semiotic" consciousness, which is shared with the audience, his asides reveal to the audience what the other characters intuit—that he is a "repressed" character. As the representative of the conventional, communicative, symbolic fiction, he is (to refer again to Woolf's Edwardian/modernist binary) the Mr. Bennett to O'Neill's Mrs. Brown. A play like *Strange Interlude*, which uses a stream of consciousness method for "digging underneath" the "surface" in order to expose the secrets of the characters, is exactly the kind of "modern sex" literature that Marsden defines himself against.

When Nina is introduced, she is on the verge of a breakdown (her father has confessed to Marsden that she needs a "nerve specialist" [SI 78; act 1]). As

the feminine center of the play, O'Neill paints her with essentialist strokes: she is the neurotic, irrational and, ultimately, maternal counterpoint to Marsden, Darrell, and Evans. Marsden, in one of his asides muses, "she has strange devious intuitions that tap the current hidden currents of life . . . dark intermingling currents that become the one stream of desire . . ." (*SI* 193; act 6). Nina, like Hurst's Bertha, is "indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine," a representative of the semiotic challenge to patriarchal signification. Indeed, in her first asides, she considers Marsden, her professorial father, and their language, critically:

The fathers laugh at little daughter Nina . . . I must get away! . . .
 nice Charlie doggy . . . faithful . . . fetch and carry . . . bark softly in
 books at the deep night. . . [. . .]. The Professor of Dead
 Languages is talking again . . . a dead man lectures on the past of
 living . . . [. . .] dead words droning on . . . listening because he is
 my cultured father . . . [. . .] he is my father . . . father? . . . what is
 father?. . . . (*SI* 79, 81; act 1)

Nina's story, then, begins—quite literally—with her rejection of the Law of the Father: the "familial and social network," to use Terry Eagleton's phrase, of the patriarchy they represent, as well as their meaningless (to her) symbolic signification (165). Nina enters the play in the same way Kristeva describes the entrance of the semiotic into the symbolic: as an example of the repressed or "archaic material in an outlook of revolt, insubmission, and defiance" (qtd. in Guberman 213). Significantly, she repeats "father" until it loses meaning and

becomes—like his language—an empty signifier, and she transforms his language into material signs: as he speaks, she envisions “his words arising from the tomb of a soul in a puff of ashes . . . ” (*SI* 81; act 1).

If Nina rejects the symbolic order of patriarchy and signification in her asides (and through them, insofar as the elliptical text of all the character’s streams of consciousness stands in disordered, fragmented contrast to the ordered, communicative dialogue), she is no less direct in conversation. After her ill-begotten attempt as a sexual healer at the sanitarium for wounded soldiers, she shares what she’s learned with Marsden in what is perhaps the most daring moment in the play (and certainly one that contributed to its censorship). She begins by telling him she has “suddenly seen the lies in the sounds called words. You know—grief, sorrow, love, father—those sounds our lips make and our hands write” (*SI* 104; act 2) and has questioned the most transcendental of signifiers: God. “The mistake began,” she explains,

when God was created in a male image. Of course, women would see Him that way, but men should have been gentlemen enough, remembering their mothers, to make God a woman! But the God of Gods—the Boss—has always been a man. That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural. We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother [. . .]. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into substance, blood of Her blood again, peace of Her peace. (*SI* 106; act 2)

When she asks if Marsden would be comforted by the idea of a Mother-God, he agrees (which is fitting, since his thoughts return to his own mother throughout the play). When *Strange Interlude* is brought up in critical studies of O'Neill's work, this passage is treated as an example of the modernist break from—to quote from Brenda Murphy's essay on O'Neill's interwar period—"nineteenth-century cultural beliefs—faith in the patriarchal God of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and faith in the wisdom of the past and in the institutions based on that faith" (141). It must be emphasized, however, that Nina has not merely lost faith in the idea of a "patriarchal God"; what she rejects here is the entire system of paternal authority, the "name of the father," the "Law," which, according to Lacan, "superimposes the kingdom of culture" and "is revealed clearly enough as identical with an order of language" (*Écrits* 67, 66) and reinscribes a "matriarchal God" who offers a "passing back into substance," a reunion with the repressed maternal body, before the mirror stage and the acquisition of the "sounds called words."

When Nina, after her abortion, conceives a child with Darrell, she feels herself transformed into a Mother-God, and her stream of consciousness aside seems like an illustration of the semiotic *chora*:

There . . . again . . . this child . . . my child moving in my life . . .
 my life moving in my child . . . the world is whole and perfect . . .
 all things are each other's . . . life is . . . and the is is beyond
 reason . . . questions die in the silence of this peace . . . I am living
 a dream with the great dream of the tide . . . breathing in the tide I

dream and breathe back my dream into the tide . . . suspended in
 the movement of the tide, I feel life move in me, suspended in me .
 . . no whys matter . . . there is no why . . . I am amother . . . God is
 a Mother. . . . (*SI* 193; act 5)

This “regressive” moment represents, on both a textual and contextual level, a semiotic “return of instinctual functioning within the symbolic, as a negativity introduced into the symbolic order, and as the transgression of that order” (*Revolution* 69). Nina’s own desire for a dyadic return to “God the Mother” after death is satisfied by the feeling of merging or subsumption of herself into her child (“my child moving in my life . . . my life moving in my child”), and the elliptical sentences suggest a the rhythmic “tide” of her own pulsations that connect her to the life “suspended” within her.

The final acts of the play are spread out over two decades, and involve the dissolution of Nina and Darrell’s relationship, their son, Gordon’s suspicion of their relationship (Darrell, the doctor-scientist, uses the Oedipus complex that Marsden has rebuked earlier, to explain that, maybe Gordon “realizes subconsciously that I am his father, his rival in your love; but I’m not his father ostensibly, there are no taboos, so he can come right out and hate me to his heart’s content. If he realized how little you love me any more , he wouldn’t bother!” [*SI* 201; act 7]), Evans’ death while watching Gordon win a rowing race, and, finally, after Gordon leaves to be married, Nina’s decision to marry Marsden (who is described in the stage directions as an “old maid” [*SI* 242; act 9]) and live out the rest of their years in Platonic peacefulness. The real note of

hope left at the end of the play is that Marsden has at last become a modernist:

“Listen, Nina,” he tells her,

After we’re married I’m going to write a novel—my first real novel! All the twenty odd books I’ve written have been long-winded fairy tales for grown-ups—about dear old ladies and witty, cynical bachelors and quaint characters with dialects [. . .]. Now I’m going to give an honest healthy yell—turn on the sun into the shadows of lies—shout “This is life and this is sex, and here are passion and hatred and regret and joy and pain and ecstasy, and these are men and women and sons and daughters whose hearts are weak and strong, whose blood is blood and not a soothing syrup!” Oh, I can do it, Nina! I can write the truth! I’ve seen it in you, your father, my mother, sister, Gordon, Sam, Darrell, and myself. I’ll write the book of us! (*SI* 232-33; act 8).

The “book of us,” presumably, will be *Strange Interlude* (which, although it is a play, is also a “novel”)—and Marsden will finally begin “digging underneath” with a method more suited to excavating “truth.” It is hard not to read this as the review O’Neill hopes his play will receive: that he has revealed character and exposed “the shadows of lies” by privileging the unspoken, the hidden.

O’Neill, through Marsden, speaks out against the artifice of realism in favor of a more “honest” modernism—and it would appear his audience was listening, attentively.

In retrospect, the title, *Strange Interlude*, seems, like Robert Graves and Alan Hodge's *The Long Week-End*, to describe the interwar period—but O'Neill was not attempting prophecy (even if the timeline of the play spans fourteen years beyond 1928); the "interlude," as Nina describes it in one aside, is the moment between "the past and the future . . . the present . . . is an interlude . . . strange interlude in which we call on past and future to bear witness we are living! . . ." (*SI* 222; act 8). The idea of the transient present, the space between, is, of course, suggested by the ellipses on the page, as well as the "momentary lulls" of the "interrupting small movements and gestures" made by the actors (Wainscott 235); but it also suggests the incursion of the semiotic (the repressed, the "prespeech") into the symbolic. As Kristeva says of Céline's prose, the "three dots to space the phrases" creates a rhythm that breaks through the sentence like a "surge of instinctual drive" ("From One Identity to An Other" 141, 142). The "interlude" is made "strange" by the dramatization of heterogeneity.

Joel Pfister believes that *Strange Interlude* was popular because the asides "often take the form of sexually titillating confessions" and that the confessional nature of the play help account "for the play's great success with middlebrow and highbrow audiences"; that "once the revelation of depth is interpreted as delectable, a literature that defines its *raison d'être* as the disclosure of depth also makes itself delectable (and sellable)" (*Staging Depth* 68, 69). Although this is no doubt a reasonable claim, it could be said that most literature is concerned with the "disclosure of depth" on some level (the

audience for an Ibsen play, or readers of a Dostoevsky novel, also, arguably, expect some insight, some “revelation of depth” into human behavior). Pfister seems to find it easy to equate popularity with “bourgeois” or middle-class values and the audiences as passive, unreflective spectators. It is interesting, though, that one of the early reviewers noted that

Strange Interlude is not a play for lazy drama lovers. [O’Neill’s] unlimited employment of “asides” to describe the unspoken thoughts of his characters is more of a whip than a cushion to our imagination, and it keeps us busy. A five hour recital, with a hurried intermission for dinner, demands an alert and industrious audience” (Hammond 101).

Like modernist fiction, the play required a constructive, analytical attention—and it would appear that an “alert and industrious audience” looked forward to the experience. Even before Brecht advocated alienation as a way to situate audiences into the historical, ideological moment of the play, O’Neill was forcing audiences to adapt to, and construct, his narrative.

It is just as likely that the audiences, who were learning to come to terms with being “split” by rational and irrational drives, went to see what Frederick Lewis Allen calls “O’Neill’s five-hour lesson in psychopathology” (202) because they wanted to see how modern subjectivity was performed. If the play dramatizes the “preverbal” or semiotic working within and against the conventions of the symbolic, perhaps audiences felt a sense of transgressive pleasure in being able to witness (and navigate) these moments of irrationality.

Judith Butler's argument about gender as performative, as "drag," offers a provocative way to consider the audience reception of *Strange Interlude*:

If gender is drag, and if it is an imitation that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that *produces* the Illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core; it *produces* on the skin [. . .] the illusion of an inner depth. In effect, one way that genders get naturalized is through being constructed as an inner psychic or physical *necessity*.

(728)

To extend Butler's claims beyond gender, it is possible to see the modernist subject as learning how to imitate or approximate the new "psychological" self. Indeed, the notion of an "inner psychic *necessity*" may itself be a kind of "drag" that has, as a result of the literary stream of consciousness, come to seem natural and universally shared. Arguably, texts like *Strange Interlude* did not merely entertain and reflect the modern "psychological" subject: they helped construct it.

Two

Joyce's *Ulysses* as Self-Help

"In the *Little Review* I learned that I was human through learning that others had the same thoughts and feelings that had many years been mine, but which through a false philosophy or teaching were regarded as deserving of repression"

— C. R. S., Columbus, Ohio. (Letter. *The Little Review* 7.1 [1920]: 74)

The "'mental stream'" of "our brain carries along images—remembered or modified—feelings, resolves and intellectual, or partly intellectual, conclusions, in vague or seething confusion. And this process never stops, not even in sleep, any more than a river ever stops in its course" (Dimnet 8). This definition of the stream of consciousness appears, not in a book of literary criticism—or in a book about the philosophy of William James—but in the opening of the best selling non-fiction title of 1929: Ernest Dimnet's self-help book, *The Art of Thinking* (Hackett 139). While Dimnet's text has not received any scholarly attention—or much attention at all, for that matter, since its enormously successful debut (it sold 125, 000 copies by 1929 and remained on the bestseller list in 1930 [Hackett 140-41])—it offers a unique perspective on

modernist subjectivity. The stated purpose of *The Art of Thinking* is to help the reader “think his best and live his noblest” (xii); to learn how to overcome inferiority complexes and obstacles to thought so that readers might “find” and “be” themselves (vi-x). To this end, Dimnet defines the stream of consciousness as a method to “get at what is nearest to our most personal, viz., our subconsciousness, by leaving the hubbub of the world where it is and seeking in deep repose for what differentiates us from other men and women” (197). Dimnet’s text followed other popular self-help guides, most notably P.D. Ouspensky’s *Tertium Organum* (which popularized the teachings of Gurdjieff and suggested a “higher” or “cosmic consciousness” could be reached and featured a fold-out chart of “the four forms of the manifestations of consciousness,” from the basic forms of sensation and apprehensive awareness to the highest form of “four dimensional space,” “new sensations,” and godly “Union with the One” [Chart]) and Emile Coué’s *Self Mastery Through Conscious Autosuggestion*, a book that pointed out “that two absolutely distinct selves exist within us”—the conscious and unconscious self—and that the unconscious could be influenced by affirmations (9). Along with the Pelman Institute’s guide for harnessing the “Grasshopper Mind,” and advertisements for booklets that promised to reveal “How to Work Wonders with Your Subconscious Mind” (fig. 12), the self-help market, clearly indebted to Freudian psychoanalysis, claimed that controlling (or channeling) consciousness would lead to self-actualization and success. Joel Pfister sees the rise of popular psychology as primarily aimed at the “growing population of university-

educated white-collar workers" (*Staging Depth* 65), and while that may be true, the ubiquity and popularity of these self-help guides suggests they were met by a wide, general readership (including those, no doubt, who wanted to learn to think as if they were "university-educated") for, as Malcolm Bradbury and James

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SUBCONSCIOUS
MIND**

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Fig. 12. "How to Work Wonders With Your Subconscious Mind."

Advertisement. *Mentor* March 1927: 62.

McFarlane note, "if anything distinguishes [the interwar] decades and gives them their intellectual and historical character it is a fascination with evolving consciousness: consciousness aesthetic, psychological, and historical" (47).

Dimnet's guide, however, is significant for its focus on stream of consciousness writing as a method to tap into the hidden reservoirs of the

self—not for mere financial success, but to acquire a sense of “self-expression,” of “individuality,” and to make “literary production possible to all” (212, 209). *The Art of Thinking*, of all authors, singles out James Joyce and quotes James P. O’Reilly’s criticism of his “method”: “Sit in a favorite spot where the mind can concentrate on itself—or on nothing at all” O’Reilly writes, and “while thinking of nothing definite, write quickly whatever comes into your mind” until, “when you are conscious of influencing by reason what your hand is writing, begin again. Write, for example, a series of l’s until the letter l unconsciously begins a word, and your thought series continues. There’s the method” (qtd. in Dimnet 200). Although he is wrong defining Joyce’s style as automatic writing, Dimnet notes that this attempt to “write from [the] subconsciou[s]” is to write “as humanly, richly, and freely as possible” and “everybody wants to draw on that vein” (201).

Suggestively, Dimnet describes this form of writing as favoring “rhythms”: “some rhythms—taking the word in its fullest meaning—keep the writer nearer his subconsciousness than others” and “the habit of working on such a rhythm results in an almost physical sensation informing us that we are drawing on our innermost” (201). Anticipating Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic putting the subject “in process/on trial,” Dimnet seems to have popularized “the rhythms, the alliterations, the primary processes” that lie “closer to the unconscious” well before Kristeva termed this the “semiotic” (qtd. in Guberman 212). According to Dimnet, “getting at your innermost consciousness by

expressing yourself" is a way to avoid "year after year and day after day, [making yourself] more like anybody else and more anonymous" (212).

Within the context of the popular appeal of the "subconscious," the emergence and sensationalism of *Ulysses* suggests that Joyce's "method" was not simply a new literary form, but also the presentation of a new kind of subjectivity. Upon its first serialized appearance in *The Little Review*, the editors made a point of publishing reader reactions to *Ulysses* in the "Reader Critic" section of most issues. While many letters expressed confusion and outrage (as does S. S. B., Chicago's letter, which begins, "Really now: Joyce! what does he think he's doing? What do you think he is doing? I swear I've read his *Ulysses* and haven't found out yet what it's about, who is who or where" and concludes by offering some helpful writing advice: "Joyce will have to change his style if he wants to get on" [54]), at least one letter that followed the *Ulysses* comments offered thanks and a check to the magazine "to discharge in a small way a debt that would be difficult if not impossible to totally discharge" because from publications like Joyce's, "I leaned that I was a human through learning that others had the same thoughts and feelings that had many years been mine, but which through a false philosophy or teaching were regarded as deserving of repression until the light of *The Little Review* showed them worthy of expression" (74). Similarly, after the magazine was charged with obscenity for publishing the "Nausicaa" section, one of the editors pointed out that "Mr. Joyce's chapter seems to be a record of the simplest, most unpreventable, most unfocused sex thoughts possible" and asked, "can merely reading about the

thoughts he thinks corrupt a man when his thoughts do not?" (Heap 6). After all of the discussions of *Ulysses* as an "epic," as (to use Jennifer Levine's categories) a "poem," a "novel," or a postmodern "text" (137, 142, 147), it is interesting to encounter the reactions of contemporary readers with no critical concepts or crib sheets of Homeric parallels; readers who either found themselves assaulted or assuaged by Joyce's stream of consciousness. It is easy to forget that Joyce's representation of consciousness also shaped consciousness (the question whether the "subconscious" or preconscious is syntactical at all has seemingly been affirmatively answered by *Ulysses* and all of its imitators. Indeed, Lacan's notion of the self as constructed through language may be indebted to Joyce: according to Jean-Michel Rabaté, Lacan not only met Joyce, but also attended Larbaud's *Ulysses* lecture in 1921, before he became an analyst [97]). As Joyce explained to Djuna Barnes, "In *Ulysses* I have recorded, simultaneously, what a man says, sees, thinks, and what such seeing, thinking, saying does, to what you Freudians call the subconscious" (65). Rather than approach *Ulysses* as a closed narrative, it will be considered here in light of its reception, as a cultural document that popularized the "subconscious" and offered, to readers able to navigate its defamiliarization, practice in maintaining the heterogeneity of split subjectivity.

***“Possibly Like a Cinema”: Ulysses and the
Interwar Reader***

When Virginia Woolf is invoked in discussions of *Ulysses*, it is usually as a reminder that she thought it “an illiterate, underbred book [. . .] the book of a self-taught working man” and “ultimately nauseating” (qtd. in Steinberg 71), but more revealing than her irritation that Joyce had debuted his technique before she could reveal her own stream of consciousness method (to read her diary entries generously) is her reading notebook, in which she recorded her reactions to *The Little Review* chapters. In a section entitled “Modern Novels (Joyce),” she notes that his style is “possibly like a cinema that shows you very slowly, how a hare does jump; all pictures were a little made up before” (qtd. in Scott 643). Engaged in a similar project, Woolf nevertheless has to come to terms with the epistemology of Joyce’s style. While she never considered her own writing to be “cinematic” (film had yet to acquire sound and she viewed her writing as primarily linguistic, not pictorial), that she approaches *Ulysses* as filmic is in keeping with the way most early readers understood the novel.

In a representative 1922 review, the writer described Joyce’s method as being “in the new fashionable kinematographic vein, very jerky and elliptical” (“A New *Ulysses*” 194); Joseph Collins, an acquaintance of Joyce who is mentioned in *Ulysses*, described Joyce’s technique, in his 1923 study, *The Doctor Looks at Literature*, as a “film picture” that has “been thrown on the screen of [the] visual cortex” and writes that “the book in reality is a moving

picture with picturesque legends" (45, 50). Collins is one of the first to acknowledge one of the most repeated Joycean fact: that "for a brief time, Mr. Joyce was associated with the 'movies,' and the form in which *Ulysses* was cast may have been suggested by experiences with the Volta Theatre, as his cinematograph enterprise was called" (50). In his essay, "The Break-Up of the Novel," John Middleton Murry claims that the stream of consciousness, as practiced by Richardson and Joyce, "can be as tiring as a twenty-four-hour cinematograph without interval or plot," and that Joyce cannot "stop recording [his characters'] processes of mind" (298-99). Perhaps most famously, Judge John Woolsey, in his written decision to lift the obscenity charges against the novel, aligned Joyce's stream of consciousness method with film:

Joyce has attempted—it seems to me, with astonishing success—to show how the screen of consciousness with its ever-shifting kaleidoscopic impression carries, as it were on a plastic palimpsest, not only what is in the focus of each man's observation of the actual things about him, but also in a penumbral zone residua of past impressions, some recent and some drawn up by association from the domain of the subconscious. He shows how each of these impressions affects the life and behavior of the character which he is describing. What he seeks to get is not unlike the result of a double or, if that is possible, a multiple exposure on a cinema film which would give a clear foreground with a background visible but somewhat

blurred and out of focus in varying degrees. (qtd. in Moscato and Le Blanc 310)

To emphasize that Joyce's contemporaries compared the act of reading *Ulysses* with viewing a film is not to argue that the stream of consciousness is analogous with "montage," "flash-backs," or "fade-outs" as Robert Humphrey suggests (49) or that it is, as Alan Spiegel calls it, a "cinematographic form" (54); nor is it meant to imply that Joyce (any more than Richardson—who preferred "slow-motion photography" to "the stream of consciousness," but did not, like Woolf, see any connection between her fiction and film [Foreward 11]) was influenced by the emerging cinema. Indeed, regardless of how readers received *Ulysses*, Joyce never admitted any aesthetic relationship to film (as Richard Ellmann notes, Joyce was intrigued by the idea of a movie adaptation of his novel, but did not think it could be translated successfully [654]), and instead credited the French novelist Edouard Dujardin, whose light novel Joyce purchased in a railway station, with inspiring his use of the stream of consciousness (Ellmann 126). It seems most likely that Joyce (who kept a dream journal [Ellmann 436-38]) was influenced—despite his protestations to Barnes and others—by Freud, who advocated, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that "for the purpose of self-observation," the patient must "renounce all criticism of the thought formations which he may perceive" and "not[e] and communicat[e] everything that passes through his mind" (13). The importance of noting how early readers perceived *Ulysses* as "cinematic," suggests a new way to consider the text: not through literary, but film theory. In particular, the idea of "suture," as it has become

defined in film studies, offers a way to not only reconsider a novel like *Ulysses*, but also to understand how readers reacted to (and learned to negotiate) the presentation of consciousness.

The notion of “suture” was taken from Lacan and developed by Jacques-Alain Miller to signify what Kristeva calls the “thetic”—the moment where speech and subjectivity begin. The moment of “suture” is the drawing together of the subject into the symbolic or, as Stephen Heath explains it, “a certain closure” that follows the first recognition of the self in the mirror-stage and occurs with “the junction of the imaginary and the symbolic” (55-56). As it was appropriated by film studies, its meaning has shifted and expanded (as it shall here). In her useful synthesis of the concept of suture, Kaja Silverman writes that the “cinematic organization depends upon the subject’s willingness to become absent to itself by permitting a fictional character to ‘stand in’ for it” and “the operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, ‘Yes, that’s me,’ or ‘That’s what I see’” (205); this “castrating coherence, this definition of a discursive position for the viewing subject which necessitates not only its loss of being, but the repudiation of alternative discourses, is one of the chief aims of the system of suture” (205-6). This moment of identification—or, rather, subsumption—at the moment of submitting to the filmic narrative functions as a re-enactment of the subject’s “entry into the symbolic order” (Silverman 213). In other words, the cinematic narrative ultimately serves to privilege the symbolic: even as the filmic text “disrupt[s] the existing symbolic order [and] dislocat[es] the subject-positions within it . . . challenging its ideals

of coherence and fullness only in order subsequently to re-affirm that order, those positions, and those ideals"; despite the strange interlude of interruption, because film asks for passive consumption, "the system of suture functions not only constantly to re-interpellate the viewing subject into the same discursive positions, thereby giving that subject the illusion of a stable and continuous identity, but to re-articulate the existing symbolic order in ideologically orthodox ways" (Silverman 221). Finally, while Silverman notes that "the theory of suture has yet to be extended to literary discourse" (which is still largely the case), it would seem a fitting way to account for "first-person narration and other indicators of point-of-view" that "seem to be the equivalents for novels and poems of the shot/reverse shot formations in cinema, and like the latter would seem both to conceal all signs of actual production, and to invite identification" (Silverman 236). While suture is a helpful way to consider the "scopic" aspects of a stream of consciousness texts like *Ulysses*, which force readers to assume different (even "alien") subject-perspectives, it must be adapted to be able to address the modernist text which, by definition, foregrounds the "signs of actual production."

It is important to note, in this regard, that many of Joyce's contemporary readers resisted—if not rejected—identification with the subject-positions offered in the narrative. Immediately after noting the filmic quality of the text, for example, John Middleton Murry contends that

we long to escape from this iron wall of consciousness of which we are everywhere made sensible and to be allowed to trust to the

revelation of the object. But we are forbidden. Either the consciousness of Bloom-Ulysses, or of Marion-Penelope, or of Mr. Joyce in his avatar Stephen Dedalus-Telemachus [. . .] is ever before us to mist and complicate the things we desire to see" (299). Similarly, Holbrook Jackson, in his 1922 review of the novel, finds the point of view disconcerting: you spend no ordinary day in [Bloom's] company; it is a day of the most embarrassing intimacy. You live with him minute by minute; go with him everywhere, physically and mentally; you are made privy to his thoughts and emotions [. . .] his psychology is laid bare with Freudian nastiness until you know his whole life through and through; know him, in fact, better than you know any other being in art of life—and detest him heartily. (199)

Ulysses, Jackson claims, is a "loose-limbed book which falls to pieces as you read it—as, indeed, you do" (199). Arnold Bennett, unsurprisingly, writes that Joyce "has made novel reading into a fair imitation of penal servitude" ("Concerning James Joyce's *Ulysses*" 570); he voices the common complaint against Joyce and other practitioners of the stream of consciousness that the style records "everything—everything" without order or selection (570, 569) and, when he finished the novel, Bennett admits, "I had the sensation of a general who had just put down an insurrection" (568). C. C. Martindale goes further in his review, claiming that the novel is "incoherent" and Joyce "is trying to think *as if* he were insane": the effect is that "we do not even float equably

down the dim disgusting sewer, but continually find ourselves hitched back, with a jerk, to where we started from. Hence a new impression of desperate nightmare" (204-5). As a final example, the self-proclaimed "enemy" of Joyce and the stream of consciousness, Wyndham Lewis, offers this particularly scathing—and revealing—observation:

The method of doctrinaire naturalism [. . .] results in such a flux as you have in *Ulysses*, fatally. And into that flux it is you, the reader, that are plunged, or magnetically drawn by its thousand pages [. . .]. But the author, of course, plunges with you. He takes you inside his head, or, as it were, into a roomy diving-suit, and once down in the middle of the stream, you remain the author, naturally, inside whose head you are, though you are sometimes supposed to be aware of one person, sometimes of another. Most of the time you are being Bloom or Dedalus, from the inside, and that is Joyce [. . .]. But, generally speaking, it is *you* who descend into the flux of *Ulysses*, and it is the author who absorbs you momentarily into himself for that experience. (121)

The anxiety produced by the novel suggests that these readers could not allow themselves to identify—to say "'Yes, that's me,' or 'That's what I see.'" Whether that resistance is due to the identities he offers, his "chaotic" method, or (as in Lewis's case) to Joyce himself, it is clear that the system of suture in the novel does not encourage easy or palliative assimilation. The system of suture, in the stream of consciousness novel, is not dissimilar to Kristeva's notion of "*le sujet-*

en-procés,” or the moment a subject is split between the semiotic and the symbolic:

I myself speak of a “subject in process,” which makes possible my attempt to articulate as precise a logic as possible between identity or unity, the challenge to this identity and even its reduction to zero, the moment of crisis, of emptiness, and the reconstitution of a new, plural identity. This new identity may be the plurality capable of manifesting itself as the plurality of characters the author uses; but in more recent writing, in the twentieth-century novel, it may appear as fragments of a character, or fragments of ideology, or fragments of representation. (qtd. in Guberman 190)

These border states, when the subject is placed in process, occur when the semiotic enters into the symbolic and, for Kristeva, when the experience is not prolonged into psychosis (as happened, Kristeva suggests, to Woolf [qtd. in Guberman 214]), it is a regenerative experience. The moment of identification and “crisis,” that occurs in the system of suture, then, is the moment the subject is placed “in process”; importantly, however, the eruption of the semiotic does not serve to reinforce the orthodoxy of the symbolic—it serves as a negation and transgression of the symbolic order. To bring Kristeva’s idea of the subject together with the film viewer—to suture the concepts—allows a way to read the stream of consciousness text which *both* calls for the reader to be placed “in

process” through identification and to be re-interpellated into the symbolic order (or, to use Bennett’s metaphor, to “put down an insurrection”).

However resistant some critics may have been to enter into the narrative, it must be restated that the stream of consciousness was widely accepted by the interwar subject, and *Ulysses* is not an exception. As Bennet Cerf explains in his publishing memoir, *At Random*, the eventual publication of the novel “had an enormous sale” and that *Ulysses* was “a great best seller” (93, 95); Catherine Turner notes that the novel “surprised everyone, with the possible exception of Cerf, by winding up on the best-seller lists” and sold well in every major city but Atlanta and New Orleans (210-11). Of course, the sensational obscenity trial was behind its success (Cerf wonders how many purchased the novel only “to read the last part to see the dirty words” [95]), but its appeal (and the imitations it inspired throughout the interwar years) suggests that there were no shortage of readers who were willing to “descend into the flux” and experience the heterogeneity of its signification.

While the relationship and congruities between *Ulysses* and film has certainly been discussed—notably and recently by Maria DiBattista, whose “*Ulysses* and Cinema” attempts to “negotiate a truce between literature and film that recognizes the rights and limits of their respective domains” (222) and considers, in particular, the contribution of Joyce’s interior monologues to Eisenstein’s development of montage, the role of suture in the construction of *Ulysses*’ reader-subject has received little attention (indeed, in the single article that does name “suture” in a discussion of *Ulysses*, Thomas W. Sheeban denies

its applicability and, because he does not take actual reader-responses into consideration, quickly concludes that “Joyce’s narrative is not sutured” [486]). The concept of the sutured reader is helpful because it can simultaneously address the visual or “cinematic” aspects of the novel, as well as the ways that Joyce’s contemporary readers either accepted or resisted identification.

Instead of viewing a novel like *Ulysses* as a narrative that encourages passive reception and affirms the stability of the symbolic (which, of course, it does not)—or as a “revolutionary” text capable of inducing schizophrenic or “zero” states, the notion of the “sutured reader” may be used to describe the reader of stream of consciousness fiction who experiences the heterogeneity of the semiotic working within and against the symbolic as a moment of crisis (or even transgressive pleasure) *but is able to work through chaos or incoherence and bring the semiotic back under the symbolic functioning in order to create textual meaning* and satisfy a sense of subjective coherence.

If the “Proteus” chapter (along with “Nausicaa” and “Penelope”) is, according to Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, one of the exemplary “set pieces” of Joyce’s stream of consciousness method (194), it is important to notice that it opens by foregrounding what Stephen sees, and inculcates the reader into his subjective consciousness. As he walks along the Sandymount beach, he thinks:

ineluctable modality of the visible; at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot.

Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. Then he was aware of them bodies before of them coloured. How? By knocking his scone against them, sure. Go easy. Bald he was and a millionaire [. . .]. If you can put your five fingers through it is a gate, if not a door. Shut your eyes and see.

Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells. You are walking through it howsomever. I am, a stride at a time. (*U* 31)

While this passage has traditionally been read as an example of Stephen's highly allusive, and desultory (or "protean") philosophical thought process (which is a contrast to Bloom's more accessible consciousness), it is also a kind of primer for reading *Ulysses*. The "modality of the visible" is not only an Aristotelian concept that leads Stephen to consider the realm of signs, colors, Aristotle's bald head, and the meaning of words (like "gate" and "door"), it is a subtle rhetorical move to get the reader to assume Stephen's perspective: the "I" here, which is initially undefined, is both Stephen and the reader. As he considers sight and looks at the "nearing tide," "that rusty boot," so does the reader. However abstruse Stephen's thought process, Joyce manages to naturalize the seemingly "chaotic" and associative stream of consciousness showing its operation in an ostensibly "ordered" and "intellectual" mind. Whereas Faulkner's presentation of Benjy's consciousness, by contrast, suggests that the "preverbal" is an "incoherent nightmare" (to paraphrase

Lukács [*Realism in Our Time* 31] Joyce illustrates that the “subconscious” stream is not only the province of the abnormal or inarticulate. Through Stephen, Joyce presents consciousness as a semiotic activity: signs or “signatures” recall other signs in a chain of associational signification.

As the reader follows these associations (and accepts the model of interiority Joyce presents), the pronouns shift: the “I” which begins the paragraph becomes “you.” Stephen’s “you” here might easily be disregarded as an informal substitution for the first person, but “shut your eyes and see” is also a directive for readers to close their eyes and experience Stephen’s sensation of interior “vision.” The passage that follows moves from the third person (“Stephen closed his eyes”) to the second (“You are walking”) to the first (“I am”). The reader—and Stephen—as the “viewing subject” is not given “the illusion of a stable and continuous identity,” which, according to Silverman, is the purpose of the system of suture (321), but is instead expected, quite literally, to accept subjectivity as a linguistic construction. As the text foregrounds “the signs of [its] own production” (Silverman 321), it calls the stability of the symbolic order into question.

Three

Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Sutured Consciousness

"I think what I'm at is to change the consciousness"

—Woolf, *Selected Letters* 13 Feb., 1921 (128).

Mrs. Dalloway has now become Woolf's best-selling novel, with its film adaptation and its intertextual relationship with the novel and film *The Hours* (Biggs 157); but it was also the first novel she wrote that brought her international recognition and financial security. As she wrote in her diary on September 22, 1925, her American publisher, Harcourt Brace, reported "that Mrs. D. & C.R. [*The Common Reader*] are selling 148 & 73 weekly—Isn't that a surprising rate for the 4th months? Doesn't it portend a bathroom & a w.c. either here, or Southcease?" (DIII, 43). As a further example of the commercial appeal of the stream of consciousness, *Mrs. Dalloway* offers the reader the opportunity to navigate narrative heterogeneity—to experience being placed "in process" in order to achieve a sense of coherence within the symbolic order. In particular, Woolf's novel, like *Ulysses*, asks the reader to identify with subject-positions offered by differing streams of consciousness—to be sutured into the narrative—and interpellates the reader as a modernist split subject.

Woolf's conceptualization of her stream of consciousness method suggests a merging of interiority and the external—self and other. In “Modern Fiction,” which was published in 1925—the same year as *Mrs.*

Dalloway—Woolf, as she does in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” opposes her literary style to the “materialists” (CEII, 104) represented by Galsworthy and Bennett and, in what would become one of the most quoted definitions of the stream of consciousness novel, asks her readers to “examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day”:

The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base work upon his own feeling, and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this

unknown and uncircumscribed spirits, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (CE III, 106)

Embedded in her aesthetic is the modernist fascination with the boundaries of the inner and outer (the mind and the impressions of an ordinary day), freedom and restriction (the “free” writer not enslaved by tradition), “aberration” and convention. In her metaphor of the “semi-transparent envelope,” she distinguishes her developing style and form from the “materialist” or realist novelist’s structural linearity in terms of illumination and containment. When she positions herself as a reader of modern novels, she reacts to the “method” of the stream of consciousness technique as one that creates a strange feeling of restriction: “Is it due to the method,” she considers, “that we feel neither jovial nor magnanimous, but centered in a self which, in spite of its tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond?” (“Modern Fiction,” CE II, 108).

Importantly, reviewers of *Mrs. Dalloway* would experience similar anxieties about the limits of the inner and outer self as a result of her stylistic technique, and, like Joyce’s readers, experienced Woolf’s stream of consciousness as both “cinematic” and as a trial of subjectivity. Richard Hughes, in *Saturday Review of Literature* (16 May, 1925) begins by noting that in *Mrs. Dalloway*, “the visible world exists with a brilliance, a luminous clarity,” (an observation which was repeated in the *New York Times* advertisements for the novel) yet, despite rumbles about this new kind of fiction, it is “an unusually

coherent, lucid, and enthralling book"; curiously, Hughes observes that "in contrast to the solidarity of her visible world there rises throughout the book in a delicate crescendo *fear*," which he explains as the loss of certainty and "the bottomlessness on which all spiritual values are based," that Woolf illustrates through her characters (*CH* 158-60). Gerald Bullett's *Saturday Review* (30 May, 1925) describes the "curious sensation which is the book's continuous effect: the sensation of seeing and feeling the very stream of life, the undeviating tide of time, flowing luminously by, with all the material phenomena, streets and stars, bicycles and human bodies, floating like straws upon its surface" (*CH* 164). Admitting he does not know if Woolf means to convey "this sense of the incessant flux," he apologetically states that "I can only record my reaction to her book," and concludes, "to those who desire a static universe, this speed, this insubstantiality, this exhilarating deluge of impressions, will be perhaps unpleasing" (*CH* 164).

In the *New Statesman* (6 June 1925), P. C. Kennedy, describing Woolf's method of presenting the past, points out that it is "a device that is used constantly, especially in the 'pictures,' where the hero closes his eyes, a blur crawls across the screen" and he recalls the heroine years before (*CH* 165). Although he admires Woolf as a writer, he finds her technique "distracting": "I take it," he begins, "that Mrs. Woolf means to show us the kaleidoscope of life shaken into a momentary plan; the vagueness, the casualness, the chaos, suffering the compulsion which gives orders and makes order. . . . But all the novelty of Mrs. Woolf's technique simply distracts from it" (*CH* 166). Arnold

Bennett, writing, fittingly, for the *Evening Standard*, concedes he could not finish the novel because he “failed to discern what was its moral basis,” found no theme, disliked that “problems are neither clearly stated nor clearly solved” in the novel and, in reviving his criticism of Woolf’s ability to invent characters, writes that she “(in my opinion) told us ten thousand things about Mrs. Dalloway, but did not show us Mrs. Dalloway. I got from the novel no coherent picture of Mrs. Dalloway” (CH 190).

The most favorable critiques of Woolf’s technique include Clive Bell’s early essay for the *Dial* (December 1924) (in which he notes that in *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf presents “a perfectly comprehensible world in which no one has the least difficulty in believing; only she sees it though colored, or I had rather say oddly cut, glasses. Or is it,” he wonders, “we who see it through stained glass—glass stained with our ruling passions? That is a question I shall not attempt to decide” [CH 142]), John Crawford’s *New York Times* review (10 May, 1925) singles *Mrs. Dalloway* out from *Ulysses* (a book about “the science of language,” not literature) and Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* (a tiresome “stream of the whole of a woman’s mind . . . an almost hypnotic mass of undifferentiated syllables”) for its “clarity of thought” and design; novelists like Woolf, Crawford writes, divide readers “between those who are confused and those who are delighted and comforted to find themselves and their mental attitudes not entirely idiosyncratic”; they pose “a challenge to the reader’s own experience, and call[] for a sort of creative collaboration” between reader and author “which should serve to amplify the reader’s state of mind and of being.” According to

Crawford, Woolf's "design, in effect, is no more than another of those fashionable pictures of an attractive, pretty woman, who is selfish and worldly"; however, her "dissociations, instead of being bludgeoned directly . . . contrive insidiously to disintegrate accepted values." Clarissa Dalloway's day, Crawford concludes, "make for a vivid interaction and interrelation of social forces and personal tendencies which act upon and proceed from Clarissa" ("One Day in London," BR10). Frederic Taber Cooper's later (March 1927) essay on "The Twentieth Century Novel" for *The Bookman* notes *Mrs. Dalloway's* "flooding tide of detail" that is "so intimately sensed" that "we go circling backward and forward in dizzy spirals, until the whole complex fabric of [Clarissa's] vanished years and future hopes lies clear before us"; her use of the stream of consciousness technique allows "the speech and actions of the characters, their intimate thoughts and feelings, the impalpable background of sights and sounds and odors, [to] all fuse and interweave, until Mrs. Dalloway merges into the environment, and the environment emerges with an acting part" (46). Finally, an anonymous reviewer from the *Times Literary Supplement* (21 May, 1925) praises the novel's "stream-like continuity" but notes that "the cinema-like speed of the picture robs us of a great deal of the delight in Mrs. Woolf's style"; still, "the new form" of the novel "enhance[s] the consciousness and the zest of living" (CH 162).

What each of these early readings of Woolf's novel share is a metaphor for seeing or viewing: her writing presents the "visible world"; it produces the sense of watching a "deluge of impressions"; it is a "kaleidoscope," a world

witnessed “behind stained glass,” the novel is like a “picture” that unrelentingly presents “sights and sounds and odors.” Even Bennett’s criticism is related to sight: Woolf does not “show us” Clarissa and he “got from the novel no coherent picture” of her. Woolf did not consider or develop her stream of consciousness technique to be cinematic—indeed, in her only essay on film, “The Movies and Reality” (reprinted, largely unchanged, as “On Cinema” in her *Collected Essays*), which appeared a year after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, she dismisses film for encouraging passive reception (“the eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think,” she writes; “we see life as it is when we have no part in it”), laments the adaptation of novels like *Anna Karenina*, and dislikes the emphasis placed, not on the interiority and feelings of a character, but on appearance (“All the emphasis is laid by the cinema upon her teeth, her pearls, her velvet”). (CE II 268-70). After finding herself more interested in a flaw, a “shadow shaped like a tadpole” that “swelled to an immense size” in the negative than in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, she writes that “for a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than words. The monstrous quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself, and not the statement ‘I am afraid.’” Woolf’s essay reveals above all that she believed film should not try to emulate or encroach upon literature, but should find a vocabulary of its own. “Is there, “ she asks, “some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could this be made visible to the eye? Is there any characteristic which thought possesses that can

be rendered visible without the help of words?" All that is communicable or "is accessible to words and words alone, the cinema must avoid" (*CE* II 268-71).

Despite Woolf's reservations about the cinema, it is nevertheless apparent that her first readers understood her technique as essentially visual, if not specifically filmic (the "cinema-like speed" and the "blur" before flashbacks in "the 'pictures'"). To mediate between, on the one hand, Woolf's belief that her goal as a writer is to "get in touch with [her] reader by putting before him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to cooperate in the far more difficult business of intimacy" ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," *CE* I, 331); that "the state of reading consists in the complete elimination of the ego" (qtd. in Lee, 403) (or, as she writes in "How Should One Read a Book," "Do not dictate to your authour; try to become him. Be his fellow worker and accomplice" [*CE* I, 2) and, on the other hand, her readers' "curious sensation" of visualization, it would seem that the only theoretical concept equipped to address the simultaneity of viewing and identification is the idea of "suture," which has come to be defined in film studies as "the procedures by means of which cinematic texts confer subjectivity upon their viewers," according to Kaja Silverman (195). To call *Mrs. Dalloway* a "cinematic text" is not to agree with previous studies of the stream of consciousness technique which find chronological shifts or associative thoughts in the narrative analogous to "montage" or "cuts"; [[this review will appear in chapter one]] while these arguments may help codify or analyze the stylistic features of the text, they do little to contribute to an understanding of

how the novels that employ the technique were, and continue to be, received by readers.

“Suture,” Silverman explains, is a complex term “rendered more complex with each new statement about it, so that it now embraces a set of assumptions not only about cinematic signification, but about the viewing subject and the operations of ideology” (200). Existing on the fulcrum between the imaginary or the semiotic and the symbolic order, it is “the moment when the subject inserts itself into the symbolic register in the guise of a signifier”; it is the moment in which “subjects emerge within discourse” (Silverman 200) and is thus analagous with Kristeva’s idea of the semiotic (the space that precedes language). Because the film narrative achieves its sense of coherence through cutting (the dividing or transitional shots) and exclusion (we are unable to see beyond the frame), it is a “castrating coherence,” for the viewing subject which necessitates not only a loss of being, but the repudiation of alternative discourses” (Silverman 205-6). This submission and identification with the cinematic perspective offers the pleasures of the imaginary (of loss of being) as well as a repetition of the entry into the symbolic (by accepting the discursive position offered by the narrative)—or, to use Kristeva’s description, the subject is placed “in process” by the eruption of the semiotic. Finally, because suture depends upon the viewer accepting the cinematic perspective (“‘Yes, that’s me,’ or ‘That’s what I see’”), it is similar to Althusser’s idea of “interpellation,” wherein “the individual who is culturally ‘hailed’ or ‘called’ simultaneously identifies

with the subject of the speech and takes his or her place in the syntax which defines that subjective position" (Silverman 219).

If, then, the process of suture is the acceptance of a viewing position that carries with it at once the loss of self and confers subjectivity, Bennett's inability to "see" Clarissa Dalloway is not only tied to his inability to identify with Woolf's character, it is also a resistance to accept Woolf's perspective on characterization. Conversely, the reviewers who did experience suture while reading *Mrs. Dalloway*, appear to have entered into the same dialectic between the rational and irrational, between order and confusion, experienced by viewers of the Post-Impressionist Exhibition: Hughes contrasts the "coheren[ce]" and "solidarity" of the novel with a rising sense of "fear"; Bullett describes the "sensation" of reading as a "deluge of impressions" that contrasts with a "static universe"; Kennedy, who keeps the text at a distance, nevertheless perceives an attempt to shape "chaos" into a "momentary plan"; Crawford assumes readers will either experience confusion or collaboration, and Cooper describes the "intimately sensed" experience of the inner and outer, thought and action, "sights and sounds and odors" that "fuse and interweave" in terms of merging.

The pleasure and the anxiety produced by the text, as described by the reviewers, suggests a regression to the moment of subject formation, the boundary between the pre-Oedipal, or what Kristeva calls the semiotic register of pre-signification, of irreducible rhythm and drives, and the "coherence" and order of the symbolic. To be sutured into *Mrs. Dalloway*, then, as her

contemporary critics suggest, is to be presented at once with the loss of self and the opportunity to assume multiple, polymorphous subject-positions that allow the reader to navigate between the chaotic, irrational, transgressive register of the semiotic and the standardized, rational, conventionalized symbolic order.

***Mrs. Dalloway* and the Sutured Reader**

As she was writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, under the working title *The Hours*, Woolf wrote in her diary, “I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system” (*D* II, 248). Through her technique, which sutures the reader into the subjective experience of characters—both sane and insane—she effects a critique of the “social system” by, specifically, compelling the reader to meditate (with the characters) on the nature of class and the self amidst an increasingly standardized consumer culture. The first sentence of the novel announces: “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself,” and inaugurates the relationship between class-based identity (she would buy the flowers, not Lucy, the maid) and the marketplace. Jennifer Wicke argues that Woolf’s “market modernism,” despite Frankfurt School arguments about “high” modernism’s resistance to the culture industry, “does not target publicity or consumption per se as problems” (130); indeed, Wicke argues Woolf’s writing is “an experiment in coterie consumption” (110) and considers shopping in *Mrs. Dalloway* as “an active, even productive, creative process” (120). Aligning

Woolf's writing with economist and fellow Bloomsbury member John Maynard Keynes, Wicke writes that

for both Keynes and Woolf this activity of the market, or within the market, has an aura of enchantment [. . .]. Both comprehend that the market can be a battlefield , or a minefield, or a liquid terrain of experience, choice, agency and desire exquisitely sensitive to all the ripples that play across its surface. And for them consuming is at the heart of this rough magic. (128-9).

While Wicke does not try to oversimplify the complexity of consumption and subjectivity, her desire to redeem Woolf from critics who would cast her as a snobbish elitist with a suspicious of mass culture and perpetuate the myth of the “great divide” in order to place her at the center of a “magical” market modernism does not acknowledge how little is actually purchased or consumed in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Flowers, certainly, are bought, but, despite the single purchase of a petticoat by the pitiable Miss Kilman, the many shopping scenes in the novel result in a turning away from consumption and towards self-reflection—in some cases literally, as when Peter Walsh, after his emotional meeting with Clarissa, stops to look at new cars on display:

And there he was, this fortunate man, himself, reflected in the plate-glass window of a motor-car manufacturer in Victoria Street [. . .]. Clarissa had grown hard, he thought; and a trifle sentimental into the bargain, he suspected, looking in at the great motor-cars capable of doing—how many miles on how many

gallons? For he had a turn for mechanics; had invented a plough in his district, had ordered wheel-barrows from England, but the coolies wouldn't use them, all of which Clarissa knew nothing whatever about [. . .]. There was always something cold in Clarissa, he thought. She had always, even as a girl, a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality, and then it's all up, it's all up, he thought, looking rather drearily into the glass depths, and wondering whether by calling at that hour he had annoyed her; overcome with shame suddenly at having been a fool; wept; been emotional; told her everything, as usual, as usual. (*MD* 48-9)

Rather than offer a jubilant picture of uncritical shopping or a disinterested, critical position on consumption, the image presented here of Peter looking “drearily” at his reflection superimposed over the automobiles on display suggests a deep meditation on the nature of the selfhood in consumer culture. It is as if the mirror stage is re-enacted in reverse: the showroom window, rather than offering an image of transformation or induction into a consuming subject position, offers instead what Lacan calls the “obsessional inversion” and “isolating processes” that precede the moment of identification with the specular image that “will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations” (*Écrits* 5). The new automobiles, with their promise of future travel, only invite images of the past and regression that destabilize the ego. If, as readers, we are sutured into the text, into Peter's subjectivity, it should be noted that Woolf does

not allow us any commodity fetishism: other than providing us with the adjective “great,” we are denied Peter’s view of the new automobile models on display; instead, we are drawn further into his consciousness, into the past, to India, to when he knew Clarissa “as a girl,” into the “glass depths” that produces subjectivity itself. Instead of entering the motor-car manufacturer’s, Peter turns from the storefront and walks on, towards Trafalgar Square, continuing his reverie about Clarissa, Empire, and his Socialist past. For Woolf, commodity culture does not interpellate the the subject as a consumer; instead, it is met with an ever increasing self-reflexivity.

Similarly, as Clarissa walks towards the flower shop, she pauses to look into a book store window where she sees “Jorrick’s *Jaunts and Jollities*[,] *Soapy Sponge* and Mrs. Asquith’s *Memoirs* and *Big Game Shooting in Nigeria*, all spread open. Ever so many books there were,” Clarissa thinks, but none that would be enough of a gift to make Evelyn Whitbread express joy to see her: “how much she wanted it—that people should look pleased as she came in,” Clarissa thinks as she continues walking (10). As she meditates on her need for validation from others, she becomes self-conscious of her

narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird’s. That she held herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well, considering she spent so little. But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed

nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown[. . .]. (*MD* 10-11)

Again, the navigation of commercial culture, if it does promise signifiers that confer status and subjectivity, can intensify alienation and threatens the erasure of the self. If, to use Terry Eagleton's summation, the ego is, for Lacan, "this narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify" (*Literary Theory* 165), then consumption serves to expose the fiction of the unified self. Even stopping "to look at a Dutch picture," presumably a work of art, does not assure Clarissa of either social or corporeal distinction; her identity threatened, she is aware of "only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street" (*MD* 11). If the theory of suture holds that, when we identify with a character (when we see through Clarissa's eyes, in this case), we are inscribed into a subject-position, *Mrs. Dalloway* denies us the security, however illusory, of a sense of unitary selfhood. As tempting as it is to consider these moments when we are sutured into a subjectivity destabilized by the marketplace as implicit critiques of reification or mass culture, from the poststructuralist vantage point of the twenty-first century, where any attempt to discern between the "subject" from the "consumer" (or the "private" from the "public" self, for that matter) immediately deconstructs itself, the reflections of Peter Walsh or Clarissa Dalloway as they look through storefront windows seem more like ghostly images captured as the inner "self" is becoming indistinguishable from the products of mass consumption.

In contrast to Peter and Clarissa's "shopping" experiences, Walter Dill Scott's description of the workings of "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day" from *The Psychology of Advertising in Theory and Practice* (1921) proposes how the consumer's mind *should* think:

As I walk down a busy street, unless I am oblivious to my surroundings my thought is determined for me by the objects which surround me. My eye is caught by an artistically decorated window in which sporting goods are displayed. My mind is fully occupied for the time with the perception of these articles. The perception of one object is superseded by the perception of another, and in most cases nothing but the present objects are thought of, and this perception of present objects does not recall to my mind any objects which I have seen at other times. It happens, however, that as I see a sweater I think of the sweater which I used to wear, and then of the circumstances which attended its destruction [. . .]. At the sight of shoes I am reminded of my need for a new pair [. . .] . In the case of simple perception the mind seems to act under the ordinary laws of cause and effect. (87)

According to the advertiser's understanding of the workings of the stream of consciousness, the objective correlative of the product is another product (or a previously possessed product). The sweater or shoes that represent the madeline in this associative process calls forth the need for a new sweater or

shoes. As Scott emphasizes for the student of advertising: “*Whenever there is in consciousness one element of a previous experience, this one element tends to bring back the entire experience*”; in other words, “Things thought together or in immediate succession become ‘associated,’ or welded together so that when one returns, it tends to recall the others. The sight of a shoe suggested the entire ‘shoe experience’” (89). The importance of understanding this associative consciousness, of course, is to be able to create consistent, habitual consumer responses to the advertised product. What should be pointed out here is that while Woolf (along with other modernists) was developing her technique of exploring character through subjective interiority (“people have any number of states of consciousness,” she entered in her diary upon the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway* and, in the margin beside this claim wrote, “second selves is what I mean” [*D* III ,12]), the burgeoning advertising industry made interiority the subject of exploration in order to understand the stream of consciousness and channel it into predictable patterns of consumer behavior. “The advertiser must know his customers,” Scott writes; “he must know their habits of thought, for it is too difficult to attempt to get them to think along new lines. He must present his commodity in such a way that [the customer] can understand it without being compelled to think a new thought” (219).

As *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates, associative interiority or the stream of consciousness is unpredictable and unrestrainable, irreducible to “habits of thought”; as if addressing the postwar anxiety about the loss of individuality to the “herd instinct” of “uniformity and standardization” that Leonard Woolf

attributes in *After the Deluge* to “democracy and the industrialization which has accompanied it [and that] give enormous opportunities for the production of the sheep-like mind. Mass education, mass government, mass production, [all] encourage material and mental uniformity, and the scale of social life becomes so large that the individual seems lost and hopeless” (218). Although Virginia Woolf did not share her husband’s evidently characteristic cynicism, *Mrs. Dalloway* does foreground the conflict between the individual and uniformity, “abnormality” and conformity.

After Clarissa arrives at home with her flowers, a skywriting plane appears over Regent’s Park, and we are sutured into, and have to navigate several abruptly changing subject-positions. As the plane scrawls an advertisement, the spectators below try to decipher the message:

Dropping dead down the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for the moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away again and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps?

“Glaxo,” said Mrs. Coates in a strained, awe-stricken voice, gazing straight up, and her baby, lying stiff and white in her arms, gazed straight up.

“Kreemo,” murmured Mrs. Bletchley, like a sleepwalker [. . .].

“It’s toffee,” murmured Mr. Bowley—. (*MD* 20-1)

This important moment in the novel has been read by Michael North as evidence that it reveals a “public constituted by advertising” that is “not so very different from the intersubjective public that is coterminous with the novel itself”; the sky-written advertisement serves to “knit together subjectivities” (*Reading* 1922, 83-4). According to Reginald Abbott, in his article, “What Miss Kilman’s Petticoat Means: Virginia Woolf, Shopping, and Spectacle,” however, this moment is less communal; it is an example of a moment where “advertising literally invades Bond Street and its airspace and invites (demands)” that viewers become “mesmerized,” uncritical, receivers of “commodity speak” (202).

Taking the middle ground between North’s more positive, socially unifying reading of the skywriting scene and Abbott’s reading of the scene as a resistance to advertising, John Young believes the point of the scene is to “satirize both military and commercial capabilities to produce a ‘KEY’ for reading the world” (100). The problem with each of these readings is that they gloss over the failure of the skywriting to communicate a clear advertisement that will focus attention outward, toward a purchase.

In the preceding scene, as the the car which bystanders speculate contains the Prime Minister or the Queen (after being repaired) continues down Bond Street, we are told that “in all the hat shops and tailors’ shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire” (*MD* 18). Whereas the car is a clear, culturally unifying signified, the plane which averts

all the spectators' attention away from the car presents a signifier no one can decipher: as soon as a new letter appears, the other letters fade and dissolve. That the skywriting literally overwrites the importance of the car ("The car came on. Suddenly, Mrs. Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting our white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something!" [MD 20]) suggests Woolf wanted to call attention to the similarities between political and commercial propaganda and dramatize the increasing power of mass culture.

The significance of the sky-written advertisement is its lack of it—except for Septimus Smith. As Septimus sits in Regent's Park with his wife, Lucrezia, he interprets the slogan as a personal message:

So, thought Septimus, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing on him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signalling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (MD 21-22)

Septimus' "epiphany," if it can be called that, is ironic. As readers who have been sutured into a successive series of subjective consciousnesses trying to

decode the slogan (Mrs. Coates, Mrs. Bletchley, Mr. Bowley), the assumption of Septimus' inordinately emotionally wrought position at once places us in an irrational, "abnormal" consciousness and provides us with the "correct" response to the message which escapes everyone else. Septimus receives the coded meanings that advertising desires to send: feelings of passion, happiness, and sated desire ("for ever"). Septimus can understand the "message" because, like him, it is on the other side of signification; it is an example of a "trace," what Kristeva terms the semiotic. She defines the semiotic as that which precedes discourse but which

operates through, despite, and in excess of it and produces in poetic language "musical" but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiments, syntax itself, that guarantee of thetic consciousness (of the signified object and ego) [. . .]. [T]his signifying disposition is not that of meaning or signification: no sign, no predication, no signified object and therefore no operating consciousness of a transcendental ego. We shall call this disposition *semiotic* (*le sémiotique*), meaning [. . .] a distinctive mark, trace, index, the premonitory sign, the proof, engraved mark, imprint—in short, a *distinctiveness* admitting of an uncertain and indeterminate articulation because it does not yet refer (for young children) or no longer refers (in psychotic

discourse) to a signified object for the thetic consciousness.

(“From One Identity to an Other 133)

The “ruffled bar” (*MD* 20) of smoke, like the “bar” between the signified and signifier dissolves or “melts,” and the symbols lose their meaning. Reading through Septimus, we perceive the “distinctive mark, trace, index” in the sky as an “indeterminate articulation” that defies symbolic meaning and, furthermore, we are aware that his ability to comprehend the meaning is because he has experienced a psychic break. Within the world of the novel, Septimus is the representative of the semiotic: that which challenges the social order (the “accepted beliefs and significations”).

It is important to note that Woolf positions us—sutures us—into Septimus’ consciousness after we have inhabited, however quickly, other, ostensibly “rational” if not “ordinary” perspectives; as Clarissa’s “other” in terms of gender and class, he also represents the irrational and antisocial side of the modernist dialectic, while she (however anxiously) embodies rationality and conventionality, if not conformity (as Peter reflects, she had, “even as a girl, a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality” [*MD* 49]; she is the “perfect hostess” [*MD* 7; 62]; “the obvious things to say of her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world” [*MD* 76], and Sally later says that “Clarissa was at heart a snob—one had to admit it, a snob” [*MD* 190]); as Woolf wrote in her diary when she began the novel, “I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side—something like that” (*D* II, 207). While, to a

critic like Lukács, Septimus would simply be another example of modernism's "devaluation of the social" and "glorification of the abnormal" ("The Ideology of Modernism" 32), Woolf gave Septimus her own visions and hallucinatory experiences (Lee 191-2) and approached the "mad scene in Regent's Park" with trepidation: "I write it by clinging as tight to fact as I can & write perhaps 50 words a morning, " she wrote (*D* II, 272). By forcing the reader to assume Septimus' subjectivity, not only does Woolf attempt to create empathy for him and his condition, she also allows the reader the transgressive experience of navigating through the irrational and the antisocial. As he sits on the bench, he realizes that "sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds" and

Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (*MD* 23-24)

While both Peter and Clarissa experience, to varying degrees, crises of subjectivity, Septimus' consciousness is given to us without any of the

mediating language Woolf provides for the other characters (“She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible” [MD]; Peter “looking rather drearily into the glassy depths” [MD 49]); the directives that hail us as readers into the text and ask us to participate in Septimus’ hallucinations at the same time assures us (by our ability to understand the narrative) of the stability of our own subject-positions.

For Kristeva, the semiotic—which is associated with the pre- (or trans-) linguistic, with repressed drives—is ever present in both the text and the speaking subject, putting each “in process / on trial” (*Revolution* 22-58); the repressed drives that underlie and effectuate signification also threaten to return, to destabilize the linguistic and social order—and the individuated subject. In discourse, poetic language distorts or places symbolic language “in process / on trial” by threatening to undo or erase meaning and identity; at the same time, the production and prolongation of the deconstruction of meaning places the writer “in process / on trial.” Unfortunately for Septimus, he is caught at “zero, the moment of crisis, or emptiness” (qtd. in Guberman 190) and while he does try to constitute a new identity through his written observations “on the backs of envelopes,” he is growing more incapable of communicating in the symbolic order at all, and Rezia must write for him:

The table drawer was full of those writings; about war; about Shakespeare; about great discoveries; how there is no death [. . .]. She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense. And he was always stopping in

the middle, changing his mind; wanting to add something;
hearing something new; listening with his hands up. (*MD* 140)

Before Lacan, Woolf is exploring the relationship between signification and psychosis. Septimus' "psychotic discourse" includes not only fragmented language or "nonsense," but also surrealist images like

diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings—were they?—on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences—the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending ropes together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves. (*MD* 147)

At the limits of language, Septimus' signifiers float without any clear signifieds. They recall the childish representations that precede or correspond with language acquisition (stick figures) but they also include appropriations of the symbolic (coins turned into empty circles or "zeros") and images of the "plurality" of characters of selves (the laughing faces) that speak to his inability to assume a coherent, unified sense of self. These drawings, which are revealed just before Septimus' suicide, when read against his earlier hallucinations in Regent's Park, reveal something of schizophrenic "logic": when Rezia removes her wedding ring because she has "grown so thin," he interprets the action as a severance of their marriage: "The rope was cut; he mounted; he was free" (*MD* 67). He felt "his body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock"; and, as he

experiences a synaesthetic merging with the sounds around him, he “remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea” (*MD* 69). In his inverted reasoning, the ascending mountaineers “ascending ropes” are able to mount the “high rock” of the complete submersion of the self once his last tie—the “rope” that connects him to Rezia—is (he believes) cut.

Septimus, no longer able to repress the irrational, is not only a subject continually “in process / on trial,” he becomes the embodiment of the semiotic and its challenge to the social, symbolic order. As Woolf describes him, he poses not only a challenge to signification, but to the class system:

To look at, he might have been a clerk, but of the better sort; for he wore brown boots; his hands were educated; so, too, his profile—his angular, big-nosed, intelligent, sensitive profile; but not his lips altogether, for they hung loose; and his eyes (as eyes tend to be), eyes merely; hazel, large; so that he was, on the whole, a border case, neither one thing nor the other, might end with a house at Purley and a motor car, or continue renting apartments in back streets all his life; one of those half-educated men whose education is all learnt from books borrowed from public libraries, read in the evening after the day’s work, on the advice of well-known authors consulted by letter. (*MD* 84)

Unlike Forester’s self-educated clerk, Leonard Bast, Septimus is not only a “border case” in terms of the social hierarchy, he is “neither one thing nor the

other”: he also presents challenges to boundaries of signification (Kristeva describes instances where the semiotic erupts into the symbolic “borderline experiences” [“From One Identity to An Other,” 139]), of sexuality (his breakdown is tied to the death, at the end of the War, of his commanding officer Evans, who showed Septimus “affection” and who was “undemonstrative in the company of women” [*MD* 86], and Septimus, before marrying Rezia, thinks, “love between man and woman was repulsive to Shakespeare” [*MD* 89]), even spatiality. As he cries at the beauty of the sky-written words, Rezia, in her desperation, imagines Regent’s Park “as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost” and “the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Roman saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where” (*MD* 24); before order, before definition. Even after his death, his presence is felt as an intrusion upon Clarissa’s party (“Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here’s death, she thought” [*MD* 183]) as she is compelled to envision his suicide: “Up had flashed the ground through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness” and Clarissa assumes “somehow it was her distaster—her disgrace” (*MD* 183-4).

When the ineffectual Dr. Holmes’ directives that Septimus “notice real things, got to a music hall, play cricket” or “try two tablets of bromide dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime” (*MD* 25; 90) fail, Rezia takes him to specialist Sir William Bradshaw, who advises a rest cure and, above all, a sense of “proportion”:

Proportion, divine proportion, [was] Sir William's goddess. . . .
 Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself
 but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade
 childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to
 propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of
 proportion [. . .] Sir William with his thirty years' experience of
 these kinds of cases, and his infallible instinct, this is madness, this
 sense; in fact, his sense of proportion. (*MD* 99)

Sir William, defender of "sense," or standardized behavior, is cast as the
 antagonist in the novel; not only does his "cure" pose the ultimate threat to
 Septimus (who kills himself rather than submit to Sir William's treatment), we
 also see him from Clarissa's less paranoiac perspective as "a great doctor, yet to
 her obscurely evil" who "make[s] life intolerable, men like that" (*MD* 184-5).

The enemy of proportion is not only madness, but "conversion":

A Goddess even now engaged—in the heat and sands of India,
 the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever
 in short the climate of the devil tempts men to fall from the true
 belief which is her own [. . .]. Conversion is her name and she
 feasts on the wills of the weakly [. . .]. At Hyde Park
 Corner on a tub she stands preaching; shrouds herself in white
 and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through
 factories and parliaments; offers help, but desires power; smites
 out of her way roughly the dissentient, or dissatisfied; bestows her

blessing on those who, looking upward, catch submissively from
 her eyes the light of their own. (*MD* 100)

Sir William is not only the representative of rationality, he is also representative of Empire, of the symbolic order, of the paternal Law (of Septimus' institutionalization he says, "there was no alternative. It was a question of law" [*MD* 97]; "if they failed to support him, he had to support police and the good of society, which, he remarked very quietly, would take care, down in Surrey, that these unsocial impulses, bed more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control [*MD* 102]); for Woolf to characterize him as an "obscurely evil" figure is to interpellate the reader into a position of collusion, not only with Clarissa, but also with Septimus—with irrationality, with dissent, with the semiotic.

If the theory of suture holds that to be "hailed" forces us to "identif[y] with the subject of the speech and take his or her place in the syntax which defines that subjective position" (Silverman 219) and that this is inseparable from an ideological assumption or identification, Woolf is, using her narrative style as a form of persuasive rhetoric. Tellingly, Sir Bradshaw's philosophy of "proportion" versus "conversion" is presented impersonally, if not satirically; before it is explained, we are told that Rezia thinks "Sir William Bradshaw was not a nice man" (*MD* 98) and, as we learn of the dangers of "conversion," we learn that Rezia "divined it" that "[conversion] had her dwelling in Sir William's heart, though concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self sacrifice" (*MD* 100). To identify with Septimus,

to privilege his hallucinatory visions over Sir William's ideal of a conformity of "proportion" is to suture ourselves into the position of a subject "in process / on trial." As Kristeva writes:

an understanding of intertextuality—one that points to a dynamics involving a destruction of the creative identity and reconstitution of a new plurality—assumes at the same time that the one who reads, the reader, participates in the same dynamics. If we are readers of intertextuality, we must be capable of the same putting-into-process of our own identities [. . .]. We also must be able to be reduced to zero, to the state of crisis [. . .]. ("Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation" 190).

The notion of an "intertextual" reading, which seems congruous with the notion of suture, involves an openness to a loss of self and an identification with a new "plurality." It is interesting to consider Hughes' idea of "fear," Cooper's metaphors of "merging" and "emerging," and Crawford's statement about how the novel "disintegrate[s] accepted values" as examples of readers placed "in process / on trial" by *Mrs. Dalloway*. It must be noted that the novel itself appeared at a time when modernism and the stream of consciousness was viewed as potentially harmful, as threatening to a socially acceptable sense of "proportion." In "Literature and Bad Nerves," an article that appeared in *Harper's* in 1921, Wilson Follett argues that "in the most striking of the ultra-modern tendencies in art and literature the neurotic element is uppermost, and that the rapid vogue of these ultra-modern tendencies is simply the answer of a

nervously overwrought public to art in which it finds its own neurotic impulses perfectly reproduced" (107). Follett sees modernism as adversarial to communication and views it as a serious threat to the reader:

The truth is that there is a degree of actual peril in the theory which makes uncontrolled intuition the ultimate fine fruit of consciousness. The neurotic theory, consistently followed out [. . .] induces a quite definitely neurotic condition in the individual, even if he be normal to begin with. It leads him by degrees into the exact state of a man whose nerves are set twitching and jangling by a combination of overwork, worry, insomnia, and black coffee. (113)

The end result of exposure to this type of literature, is an "ingrowing self-consciousness, which leads always to philosophic or esthetic anarchy [and] is an unhealthful condition for the mind of man the social animal. Mostly, he cannot live to himself alone and keep his sanity" (116). While it would be easy to dismiss Follett's argument as ridiculous and reactionary, it does reveal the fear and suspicion modernism encountered as it emerged, and suggests how those who risked their "nerves" on these texts might have considered the act of reading to be transgressive and evidence of a countercultural statement of individualism.

Although Rezia again admits to herself "that she did not like [Sir William]," that "he swooped; he devoured. He shut people up" (*MD* 102), they return to their lodging house in Bloomsbury to await instructions about when

Septimus will be committed to one of Sir William's "homes," but he kills himself before Holmes and Bradshaw can "get him" (*MD* 149). What precedes Septimus' death is one of the more enigmatic scenes in *Mrs. Dalloway*: as Rezia makes a hat for their landlady's daughter, Septimus, on the couch, "began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether the gramophone was really there. But real things—real things were too exciting. He must be cautious. He would not go mad" (*MD* 142), realizing he is not hallucinating, he looks at Rezia: "he shaded his eyes so that he might see only a little of her face at a time, first the chin, then the nose, then the forehead, in case it were deformed, or had some terrible mark on it. But no," he realizes, "there she was, perfectly natural, sewing, with the pursed lips that women have, the set, melancholy expression, when sewing" (*MD* 142). In a simulation of the infant's identification with the coherent image in the mirror that initiates selfhood, Septimus works through fragmentation to attain a sense of a coherent image for which to see Rezia. Significantly, when he is able to recognize her, he is able to speak "for the first time in days . . . as he used to do" (*MD* 143) when he makes fun of the hat and helps Rezia decorate it. Believing he has returned to his former self, Rezia pins a rose to the hat and gushes, "never had she felt so happy! Never in her life!" (*MD* 143). As Septimus "began putting odd colours together" for the hat's design, he instructs Rezia: "be very, very careful, he said, to keep it just as he made it" (*MD* 143). In a literal moment of "suture," Rezia sews the hat:

when she sewed, he thought, she made a sound like a kettle on the hob; bubbling, murmuring, always busy, her strong little

pointed fingers pinching and poking; her needle flashing straight
[. . .].

“There is it,” said Rezia, twirling Mrs. Peters’ hat on the tips of
her fingers. “That’ll’ do for the moment. Later . . .” her sentence
bubbled away drip, drip, drip, like a contented tap left running.

It was wonderful. Never had he done anything which made
him feel so proud. It was so real, it was so substantial, Mrs. Peters’
hat.

“Just look at it,” he said.

Yes, it would always make her happy to see that hat. He had
become himself then, he had laughed then. (*MD* 1434)

As the precursive event to his suicide, the construction of the hat requires some examination. On the one hand, we might see the act of suture here and the construction of the hat as evidence of Septimus’ return to sanity and, thereby, ascribe a sense of agency or conscious defiance to his suicide for, as Jacques-Alain Miller writes, “suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse [. . .] it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in” and “it implies the position of a taking-the-place of” (qtd. in Silverman 200)—in other words, the image of Rezia sewing allows him to bring together inner and outer, signified and signifiers, self and image and reinscribe himself into the symbolic order. On the other hand, however, Septimus ascribes a disproportionate amount of significance to the finished hat: it articulates what his diagrams, his writings, even his prewar, Shakespeare-inspired poems could

not: “never had he done anything which made him feel so proud. It was so real, so substantial.” It does not represent a hat, for him, but completion, fulfillment. It is difficult not to emphasize the word “real” in the description of the hat and try to consider it in relation to Lacan’s idea of “the Real” as an object that seems to satisfy primordial lack. While “the Real” for Lacan is unknowable, a sacrifice to language, it is interesting to consider how Woolf might be using the hat as an approximation of the Real for Septimus, who has passed through signification and the imaginary in his psychosis, and finds ultimate meaning in this object. Doreen Fowler explains that

what is important about the Real is that it posits the possibility of meaning outside of the arbitrary cultural orderings of the symbolic order. This “real” meaning may be the transcendental meaning that we so desperately desire [. . .]. As creatures trapped in language, we cannot know; however, Lacan implies that the Real is implicated in the subject’s encounter with death
(*Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed*, 14).

From this perspective, then, we might see Rezia’s act of sewing as a reversal or “undoing” for Septimus (which is in keeping with his previous reversals of being “high” as he is “under the sea”); as she sews and speaks he hears her rhythms as water, “bubbling, murmuring” and her sentence as a “drip, drip, drip,” like a “tap left running.” On the other side of meaning, having accepted the semiotic, “he had become himself.” While he does speak, it is to direct his own gaze: “just look at it,” he says—but what he sees is not an imaginary / that

will re-connect him to the world of the symbolic; it is a manifestation of the Real, which is the prefiguration of his death. Understanding, now, that his drawings and notes on the backs of envelopes are unable to reach the Real, he tells Rezia, “Burn them!” (*MD* 48). When she leaves the room to intercept Dr. Holmes, Septimus decides to jump out of the window, “but he would wait till the very last moment,” we are told. “He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun was hot Only human beings—what did *they* want?”; it is only when Holmes enters that Septimus “flung himself vigorously, violently down on the Mrs. Filmer’s area railings” (*MD* 149), rather than be reinscribed into the symbolic order.

As Septimus’ “double” (according to Woolf in her original preface to the novel [“Introduction” vi]), Clarissa serves as not only the rational counterpart to his irrationality in the novel’s dialectic, but she also presents the sutured reader with a point of identification and reinscription into the symbolic order that Septimus so vociferously rejects. This is not to say, however, that she offers an unchallenging or totalizing perspective that negates the reader’s experience, with Septimus, of being placed “in process / on trial” (indeed, Woolf’s alternation of Clarissa’s stream of consciousness with Septimus’—among the others in the novel—keeps the tension between the rational and irrational rising throughout the narrative). When she returns from her trip to buy the flowers, she retires to her private bedroom and contemplates her sexless marriage, the “virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet” (*MD* 31), and considers her attraction to women (“of women together. For *that* she could dimly perceive” [*MD* 31]). When other women have confided in her,

she did undoubtedly feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion [. . .]. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (*MD* 32)

From this thinly veiled metaphor for the orgasmic sensation she approaches only in moments of feminine contact, she asks herself, “bu this question of love (the thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?” (*MD* 32). With Sally she entertains socialist ideals (“they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom [. . .] talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They mean to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out” [*MD* 33]), experiences the “feeling as she crossed the hall if it were now to die ‘twere now to be most happy” because Sally is under the same roof at Bourton, and recalls “the most exquisite moment of her whole life”: “Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally” (*MD* 35).

As remarkable as Clarissa’s meditations on her romantic feelings for women in general and Sally in particular may seem now, it is even more compelling to consider how Woolf’s contemporary readers, sutured into Clarissa’s experience, reacted to being placed in her subject-position.

Revealingly, the first reviewers are conspicuously silent about Clarissa's relationship with Sally Seton (as they are about Septimus' relationship with Evans), but the concept of suture may offer some explanation for this: Richard Hughes, remarkably summarizes the novel as "an account of a single day in London life; its sole principal event is the return from India of Mrs. Dalloway's rejected suitor" (159) and Gerald Bullett believes the central perspective of the novel to belong to Peter: "It rests, this penetrating ray, longest upon Peter Walsh himself, who is just returned from long exile in India" (163). P. C. Kennedy begins his summary of the novel with "Peter Walsh, home from India, has all his life loved Clarissa, who has married Richard Dalloway and borne a daughter, Elizabeth. Clarissa goes for a walk, and sees a motor-car containing a Personage [. . .]" (165). Conspicuously, each of these male reviewers place Peter at the center of the novel—even, in Kennedy's case, to the extent of altering the sequence of the novel to make Peter's return (and not Clarissa or her party) the beginning of, and the occasion for, the narrative.

After her reverie about Sally, Clarissa passes her dressing table mirror and sees "the whole of her[self] at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself" (*MD* 37). As she studies her reflection, she thinks, "how many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass [. . .]. That was her self—pointed; dart-like; definite" (*MD* 37). As she reassures herself of the unity of her identity after her moment of anxiety while

shopping, earlier, she is presented as a sharp, “definite” contrast to Septimus, who feels empty and undefined, his body “spread like a veil upon a rock” (*MD* 69). While Septimus is a “subject in process,” a “border case,” Clarissa offers a more stable, consistent point of identification within the symbolic order, while also presenting challenges to its patriarchal authority. From her moment of self-reflection, she turns to mend the gown she will wear for her party and, in a turn that serves as an interesting counterpoint to the sewing scene with Rezia and Septimus, is reunited with Peter Walsh. Before he rushes in, she sits sewing, “calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly, to the belt. So an a summer’s day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying ‘that is all’ more and more ponderously” (*MD* 39); into this rhythmic peaceful moment where silk and self merge with the sea (as opposed to Septimus’ vision of the sea as death and the dissolution of self), “the door opened, and in came—for a single second she could not remember what he was called! so surprised was she to see him, so glad, so shy, so utterly taken aback to have Peter Walsh come to her unexpectedly in the morning! (*MD* 40). In the conversation that follows, Clarissa continues to sew while Peter engages in his habit of playing with his pocket-knife:

“And what’s all this?” he said, tilting his pen-knife towards her green dress.

He’s very well dressed, thought Clarissa; yet he always criticises *me*.

Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual, he thought; here she's been sitting all the time I've been to India; mending her dress [. . .].

And she opened her scissors, and said, did he mind her just finishing what she was doing to her dress, for they had a party that night? (*MD* 43)

Before his moment of crisis, when he admits he is in love with a woman in India and begins to cry, he studies Clarissa and thinks he “would like to make a clean breast of it all [. . .] but she is too cold, he thought; sewing, with her scissors; Daisy would look ordinary beside Clarissa. And she would think me a failure. . . . he was a failure, compared with all this—the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks . . . he was a failure!” (*MD* 43). The tension in the scene between suture and cutting (“he said, titling his pen-knife towards her green dress”; “she opened her scissors”) is analogous to the act of reading the novel. If the process of suture, according to Silverman, is a “castrating coherence, this definition of a discursive position for the viewing subject which necessitates [. . .] its loss of being” (205), it is important to notice the way Peter and Clarissa’s subject-positions each carry a threat of castration: as the past and present, the inner and outer, the self and other are brought together within the novel, there is always the threat of a narrative cut or shift into another consciousness or subject-position. Importantly, it is Peter’s subject-position which relents to Clarissa’s: his pretensions to phallic power (his pen-knife) is no match for her needle, her scissors, her paper-knife, her candlesticks:

as he sits, “running his finger along the blade of his knife . . . to his utter surprise, suddenly thrown by those uncontrollable forces thrown through the air, he burst into tears; wept; wept without the least shame, sitting on the sofa, the tears running down his cheeks” (*MD* 46).

Clarissa’s stability within the symbolic order owes much to her belief in and interpellation by the class system. Peter recalls, once, at Bourton, “talking about a man who had married his housemaid, one of the neighboring squires [. . .] he had married his housemaid and she had been brought to Bourton to call—an awful visit it had been. She had been absurdly over-dressed, ‘like a cockatoo,’ Clarissa had said” (*MD* 59); and when she learns that the former housemaid had had a baby before the marriage, Clarissa replies, “Oh, I shall never be able to speak to her again!” (*MD* 59). For all of her self-confidence, she depends upon the construction of an “other” to keep herself defined. On a structural level, Septimus is her “other”—the irrational, antisocial side of the dialectic for which she represents rationality and the social—but on a personal level, Clarissa’s “other” is Doris Kilman. As Miss Kilman, Elizabeth Dalloway’s tutor, waits for Elizabeth, Woolf offers the following description:

outside the door was Miss Kilman, as Clarissa knew; Miss Kilman in her mackintosh, listening to whatever they said.

Yes, Miss Kilman stood on the landing, and wore a mackintosh but had her reasons. First, it was cheap; second, she was over forty; and did not, after all dress to please. She was poor, moreover; degradingly poor. Otherwise she would not be taking

jobs from people like the Dalloways; from rich people, who liked to be kind. Mr. Dalloway, to do him justice, had been kind. But Mrs. Dalloway had not. She had been merely condescending. She came from the most worthless of all classes—the rich, with a smattering of culture. They had expensive things everywhere; pictures, carpets, lots of servants. She considered that she had a perfect right to anything that the Dalloways did for her. (*MD* 123)

If the “other” is that which designates and defines subjectivity, both Clarissa and Miss Kilman see each other as “the other.” What is particularly interesting about this passage is the way Woolf makes the transition from Clarissa’s consciousness (“Clarissa knew”) to Miss Kilman’s ambiguous; without attributing any directives or tags, it is not clear that we have moved into Miss Kilman’s consciousness until we read “people like the Dalloways.” As with Sir William’s perspective on “proportion” and “conversion,” the reader is kept from a direct identification or suture with Miss Kilman: like Sir William’s, her values are introduced only to be exposed as antithetical to Clarissa’s and Septimus’. Cast as self-righteous, sanctimonious, and hypocritical, Miss Kilman, we are told, “pitied and despised” Clarissa Dalloway, and wishes to expose, to “unmask” Clarissa: “If only,” we are told, “she could make her weak; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God’s will, not Miss Kilman’s. It was to be a religious victory. so she glared; so she glowered” (*MD* 125). Perhaps more damning, for postwar readers, than her religious zealotry, is her German heritage (“It was true that the family was of

German origin; spelt the name Kiehlman" (*MD* 123]) and belief that "after all, there were people who did not think the English invariably right" about the War (*MD* 130). Despite her "pity" for Clarissa (*MD* 132), "she minded looking as she did beside Clarissa . . . but why wish to resemble her? Why? She despised Mrs. Dalloway from the bottom of her heart. She was not serious. She was not good. Her life was a tissue of vanity and deceit. Yet Doris Kilman had been overcome" (*MD* 128). As her "other," Clarissa is all that Miss Kilman is not, yet also what she desires to be. After she purchases her petticoat and is unable to keep Elizabeth with her any longer, Miss Kilman is left alone, admitting that "Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed" as she is left to walk through the department store, "through all the commodities of the world, perishable and permanent, hams, drugs, flowers, stationary, variously smelling, now sweet, now sour she lurched" until, like Peter Walsh, she is faced with her own reflection: she "saw herself thus lurching with her hat askew, very red in the face, full length in a looking-glass; and at last came out into the street" (*MD* 133). Unlike Peter, however, or Clarissa, for that matter, Doris Kilman does not experience any crisis of subjectivity; she goes immediately to Westminster Cathedral to pray. As the only consumer in the novel, she is also the least sympathetic and the least self-reflexive. While she is haunted by her desire to "resemble" Clarissa, she does not acknowledge how her subjectivity is dependent upon her.

Clarissa, on the other hand, unencumbered by religious hypocrisy, does try to understand Miss Kilman and her own feelings of antipathy toward her. As she thinks about Elizabeth's relationship with Miss Kilman, Clarissa thinks,

but why with Miss Kilman? who had been badly treated, of course; one must make allowances for that [. . .]. Anyhow they were inseparable, and Elizabeth, her own daughter, went to Communion [. . .]. She was never in the room five minutes without making you feel her superiority, your inferiority; how poor she was; how rich you were; how she lived in a slum without a cushion or a bed or a rug or whatever it might be, all her soul rusted with that grievance sticking in it, her dismissal from school during the War—poor embittered unfortunate creature! For it was not her one hated but the idea of her[. . .].

(*MD* 12)

Able to separate the person from the “idea,” Clarissa humanizes Miss Kilman and is aware that the offense she causes is to Clarissa’s own sense of self. Even as Miss Kilman stands in judgment of her, Clarissa sees her and, “second by second, the idea of her diminished, how hatred, (which was for ideas, not people) crumbled, how she lost her malignity, her size, became second by second merely Miss Kilman, in a mackintosh, whom Heaven knows Clarissa would have liked to help” (*MD* 126). Finally, at her party, Clarissa realizes that designating “Kilman her enemy” was “satisfying.” Startlingly, she admits, “she hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends” (*MD* 175). To secure her sense of self as her party begins, she simultaneously admits her rejection of and need for Miss Kilman.

As useful as Miss Kilman is in helping to uphold her identity, it is only when Clarissa learns of Septimus' suicide that the dialectic between the irrational and rational comes to a close and Clarissa's perspective is validated. When Sir William relays the news of Septimus' death and Clarissa is made to visualize it, she is at first stunned that death has intruded upon her party; ultimately, though, she realizes that

The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him [. . .]. She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty, made her feel the fun. (*MD* 186)

Septimus' death is presented as that which not only enables her to sustain the "beauty" and "fun" of her class, it is also presented as a victory for the symbolic. As the representative of the chaotic, irrational semiotic, Septimus, the "border case," threatens to collapse boundaries not only of class, but also of and signification and subjectivity. With the death of Septimus, the reader, along with Clarissa, is left re-inscribed into a stable identity.

Where the suture of *Mrs. Dalloway* differs from the suture of cinema, however, is that, while "the viewing subject's position is an supremely passive one," according to Silverman, and offers to "disrupt the existing symbolic order [and] dislocat[es] the subject-positions within it," it does so "only in order to subsequently re-affirm that order, those positions, those ideals" (Silverman 231;

221). Reading *Mrs. Dalloway*, on the other hand, must be active and, as John Crawford notes, demands “a sort of creative collaboration.” As Woolf writes in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” “it is this division between reader and writer, this humility on your part, these professional airs and graces on ours, that corrupt and emasculate the books which should be the healthy offspring of a close and equal alliance between us” (336); interpellating the reader as a collaborator, she contributed to the creation of the modern consciousness.

Four


Addie's Coffin and the Narrative I/Eyecon: Faulkner's Typographic Semiotics

At the 1983 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, André Bleikasten called for a redirection in Faulkner studies. Addressing a predominately New Critical audience, he argued that “there has been much more interest in what [Faulkner's] fiction is presumed to *say* (its social or psychological significance, its moral “message,” etc.) than in what it *is*, how it *functions*, and what it *does*” (“Reading Faulkner” 16). Although some recent critics have tried to address the aesthetic dimensions of Faulkner's texts, to account for the way these texts function, there is still considerable lacunae in the scholarship. In particular, while there has been no shortage of arguments about the indeterminacy and inadequacy of language which oppress many of Faulkner's central characters, few inroads have been made in connecting this thematic “message,” to use Bleikasten's term, with the radical textual and typographical experiments that distinguish the novels of his “high modernist” period. Conventionally, Faulkner's stylistics have been relegated to heuristic status; they function to define character, to advance (or defer) the plot, or to approximate “pre-speech” levels of consciousness. When his “technique” is foregrounded—as in Michael J. Toolan's more recent *The Stylistics of Fiction: A Literary-Linguistic Approach*

(1990) (which pays more attention to the more conventional later work, specifically *Go Down, Moses*)—Faulkner’s narrative innovations are domesticated into pat syntactic units and deictic and lexical patterns. If indeed Faulkner’s early experimental novels, namely *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury* are, in the words of one representative critic, “about language and experience and experience in language” (Delville 62), it follows that a study of his unconventional typography cannot be ignored in favor of thematic or character analysis (no matter how informed by poststructuralism); rather, the textuality must be read as a concretization or materialization of the crisis in signification. If there has been a critical inability to reconcile what *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury* “mean” and how they function, it is because linguistic critics after Bleikasten have employed, almost exclusively, a Saussurean approach to novels which clearly do not conform to the strict signified/signifier binarism. Because these texts foreground the materiality of language and the page, because they introduce typographical features and pictograms as substitutes for syntactic signs, and because they attempt to present the unsayable, *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, to be read on their own terms, “to heed [their] uncertainties and indeterminacies, [their] disjunctions and dissonances” (Bleikasten 17), must be considered from the semiotic perspectives of Julia Kristeva and C. S. Peirce.

The metatextuality of *As I Lay Dying* is evident from the first pages when we are introduced into Darl Bundren’s fragmented consciousness and reaches

its apex in Tull's section, when the reader is presented, mid-sentence, with a drawing of the coffin Cash has made for Addie:

They had laid her in it reversed. Cash made it clock shape, like this  with every joint and seam beveled and scrubbed with the plane, tight as a drum and neat as a sewing basket, and they had laid her in it head to foot so it wouldn't crush the dress. It was her wedding dress and it had a flare-out bottom, and they had laid her head to foot in it so the dress could spread out [. . .]. (AILD 88).

What is perhaps as startling as this interruption in the narrative is the lack of critical attention it has received. To date only two articles have focused on this drawing: Michael Kaufmann's "The Textual Coffin and Narrative Corpse of *As I Lay Dying*" (reprinted in his book *Textual Bodies: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Print*) and Barry McCann's "Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: The Coffin Pictogram and the Function of Form." According to Kauffman, the coffin exemplifies the central conflict in the novel: the tension between the oral ("tall") tale of the narrative and the printed page. He writes:

The dominance of the coffin—in print and in the narrative—exposes the posteriority of the printed text, the fact that all print accounts—even those like *As I Lay Dying* in the present tense—are past accounts [. . .]. It is as if the morbidity of Addie's corpse and her coffin container reveal the nature of the text itself, exposing the illusion of the present tense and the preterite nature

of the printed text, which is always already “done,” always already dead, a coffin encasing its formerly living oral content. The exposure reveals Faulkner’s high-modernism in his showing of printed form and its intersection with narrative, yet the contrast of dead print with living oral tradition recalls early modernism’s attempt to revivify printed language with speech. (47)

Turning his attention to Addie’s section of the novel, Kauffman concludes that “her voice destabilizes all voices” and “makes it apparent that no living voice speaks from beyond the page. All the voices in the book must be seen as *printed* voices [. . .]. Addie’s complaint about the disjunction between words and deeds, then, does not show Faulkner’s distrust of language so much as his uneasiness with *printed* language” (48). What Kauffman overlooks is crucial here. *As I Lay Dying* does not present soliloquies—not “voices”—but the predominately unvocalized consciousnesses of alternating characters. However much the “plot” of the novel resembles a folk tale, it is nevertheless recast as unspoken discourse. Not only is there little foundation to support that Faulkner was “uneasy” with printed language (indeed, the biographical evidence reveals him to have been a much more recalcitrant speaker than writer), Kauffman, in insisting on the disjunction between print and speech, misses the point that consciousness is not exclusively linguistic and that what would be implausible in speech (the introduction of images) is endemic—indeed elemental—to thought.

For McCann, “the coffin pictogram is a structural symbol” for the Bundren Family, on the one hand: “In giving a geometric diagram, Faulkner begs the reader to notice the coffin has six sides, with perfect symmetry. Interestingly enough, there are six family members, excluding Addie: Darl, Jewel, Case, Dewey Dell, Vardaman, and Anse. Addie, naturally, fills the coffin” (273). On the other hand, “with the coffin shape,” McCann also suggests, Faulkner replaces an “abstract idea” with a “concrete object”:

The pictogram is similar to Lacan’s mathematical symbol of S/s , which represents “distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification,” “the signifier over the signified” [. . .]. In linguistic terms, the coffin pictogram (signifier) transforms itself into a metonymic chain that holds the novel together across levels of reading [. . .]. The metonymy exchanges the inner (death) for the outer (coffin), but neither exists apart from each other; they exist in tension with one another. In linguistic terms, the *signifier* does not hold together a larger meaning structure—the tension *between* the signifier and the signified is the bonding force. Or, in Neo-Freudian terms, this tension is the desire to find meaning, to discover true substance and identity behind the form. (273, 279)

As tempting as it may be to read the coffin image as a resisting signifier, this does not yet account for its inclusion in the text. While McCann’s gesture towards a Lacanian reading of the family structure is promising, his similar

reading of the narrative structure is less so; to read the coffin image as simply a depiction of “the structure of inner/outer or signified/signifier” within the novel (276) reduces what is, in point of fact, an iconic sign into a simple Saussurean binarism. Unlike Saussure, Peirce’s triadic model of the sign allows for the possibility of a relational connection between an object and the signifier.

Peirce’s often quoted definition of the sign is important to repeat here:

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen. (“Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs” 4)

For our purposes, the significance of this passage is that the “object” relation to the sign is considered a necessary (even fundamental) element in the signifying process. To read Faulkner’s drawing of the coffin as testament either of his “uneasiness with *printed* language” or as a narrative symbol of the inability to reconcile words and meaning (S/s) is to overlook the fact that Faulkner is not lamenting the inadequacy of signification, he is asserting and insisting that the literary sign evidence the richness and complexity of triadicity. The coffin drawing, in Peircean terms, is an icon (a “hypoicon,” to be exact, insofar as it is

a material reproduction of the Addie's actual coffin). An icon, as Peirce defines it, falls within the secondary class of signs; it is

a Representamen whose Representative Quality is a Firstness of it as a First. That is, a quality that is has *qua* thing renders it fit to be a representamen. Thus, anything is fit to be a *Substitute* for anything that it is like [. . .] a sign may be *iconic*, that is, may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being. ("Logic as Semiotic" 10)

Because Tull evokes the image as an immediate explanation of the shape of the coffin Cash has beveled, it may be labeled a "diagram"; it "represent[s], mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts" ("Logic as Semiotic" 10). Elsewhere Peirce emphasizes the seductiveness of the icon:

I call a sign which stands for something merely because it resembles it, an *icon*. Icons are so completely substituted for their objects as hardly to be distinguished from them [. . .]. A diagram, indeed, so far as it has a general signification, is not a pure icon; but in the middle part of our reasonings we forget that abstractness in great measure, and the diagram is for us the very thing. So in contemplating a painting, there is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure

dream,—not any particular existence, and yet not general. At that moment we are contemplating an *icon*. (*Essential Peirce* 226)

Degenerate or illusory as it may be, the coffin hypoicon-diagram is the concretization, the realization of the coffin which is the controlling sign in *As I Lay Dying*.

It is important, in light of Peirce's definition, to recall the context in which the icon appears. We are, ostensibly, in Tull's unmediated consciousness, yet he offers the diagram as an analogy: "Cash made it clock shape, like this" (*AILD* 88); as Kauffman points out, the icon concretizes the gesture Cash made earlier in novel. Responding to Addie's dying call,

He looks up at the gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight. It is the composite picture of all time since he was a child. He drops the saw and lifts the board for her to see, watching the window in which the face has not moved. He drags a second plank into position and slants the two of them into their final juxtaposition, gesturing toward the ones yet on the ground, shaping with his empty hand in pantomime the finished box. For a while still she looks down at him from the composite picture, neither with censure or approbation. Then the face disappears. (*AILD* 48)

Addie dies when she is certain that the coffin will be finished. Tull's qualifying statement "like this" serves not only to establish the diagram as an iconic manifestation of Cash's pantomime, it also calls attention to the analogous

nature of the icon and the object; the icon in the text is like Addie's actual smooth wooden coffin (with the rough-edged holes drilled in by Vardaman) in much the same way that the "unconscious is structured like a language" in Lacan's formulation (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 149): it works as a kind of condensation and displacement of the signifier "coffin" for the "actual" coffin. That this is indeed the case is evidenced by the original manuscript of *As I Lay Dying*. As George Palmer Garrett notes in his article "Some Revisions of *As I Lay Dying*," Faulkner's often-quoted claim that the novel was conceived as a "*tour de force*" that required little revision seems to be substantiated by comparing the typescript with the final printed text; importantly, one of the few substantive changes Faulkner made was the deletion of the word "coffin" from the scene quoted above (Garrett 416). "In the manuscript version," Garrett observes, "the box which Cash is making for his mother, Addie Bundren, is called a coffin [. . .]. In the printed text 'coffin' is deleted" (416). Indeed, in the printed version, the word "coffin"—in a novel centered around one—is mentioned only eight times (22, 79 [2 instances], 187, 191, 219, 221, 222), and only twice before the icon appears in the text (significantly, the word is spoken by Cora and Tull in their respective sections—not by the Bundrens). What the textual scholarship reveals is that Faulkner did not, as McCann assumes, use the coffin "as a physical structure" as a "substitution of 'death' for 'coffin'" (279); the icon does not repress the word "death"; it replaces the signifier "coffin" for an "actual" (to the "middle part of our reasoning") coffin. Earlier in the novel, Jewel's inability to say "coffin" appears in the text as two interesting typographical elisions:

"It's laying there, watching Cash whittle on that damn."

Jewel says.

He says it harshly, savagely, but he does not say the word [. . .].

"If everybody wasn't burning hell to get her there," Jewel says in that harsh, savage voice. "With Cash all day long right under her window, hammering and sawing at that——" (*AILD* 19)

In what are clearly—on the level of characterization—repressive moments are, typographically, gaps or interruptions in the narrative which predicate the appearance of the icon. The arbitrary signifier "coffin" is replaced by textual space, by diacritical icons, in the same way that Tull's diagram will substitute the word for the object.

To understand the role the coffin icon plays within the narrative design, we need to look again at Addie's section. If there is a critical consensus about Addie, it is that she feels herself to be excluded from the symbolic order of signification. While it is true that Addie does find words to be inadequate, "that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (*AILD* 171), it is incorrect to say that she is feels marginalized or excluded by language. For Addie, a word is "just a shape to fill a lack" (*AILD* 172); words are "like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching" (*AILD* 173), and she reflects on the arbitrariness of names:

Sometimes I would like by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name until

after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty doorframe; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember *Anse* [. . .]. And when I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into shape and then fade away, I would say All right. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them. (*AILD* 175)

What should be noted here is that Addie's dilemma is not Saussurean; she is not struggling to match the signifier and signified—we should not forget that Addie is a teacher and clearly more articulate than her husband. Rather, she is rejecting the abstraction of the arbitrary signifier and emphasizing instead the concrete referent. By meditating on the letters of names and mutating these names into objects—molasses, spiders, a door frame, an empty jar—she is materializing the sign in a way that Saussurean linguistics simply cannot address: for Saussure, “the mode of inscription is irrelevant, because it does not affect the system. Whether I write in black or white, in incised characters or relief, with a pen or a chisel—none of that is of any importance for the meaning” (*Course in General Linguistics* 118). Further, her substitution of things for words (the inversion of the signifying process)—her “undoing” of

language—replicates the formal or typographic insistence on the icon. As Bleikasten points out,

While language is commonly assumed to be both referential and expressive, neither of these functions is acknowledged by Addie. Words, she contends, fail to make contact with the world around and within us. And not only do they fall short of their presumed referents; the trouble with them is is not just that they do not lead anywhere but that they are perversely misleading [. . .]. To Addie words are in the last resort all *negatives*, denying the existence or, to put it another way around, asserting the nonexistence of what they are supposed to signify. (*Ink of Melancholy* 202)

Addie's (and Faulkner's) foregrounding of the materiality of signs effectuates a transposition: she asserts the "nonexistence" of what words signify by replacing them with iconic representations, with physical objects. Doreen Fowler convincingly argues that Addie's voice is not marginalized but contentious: "Addie Bundren," she writes, "issues a challenge to paternal structures of meaning" (50). Significantly, the paginal gap introduced by Addie—"The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*" (*AILD* 175)—not only elides the signifier but erases it. The lacuna is structurally linked to Jewel's inability to say "coffin" and Tull's "like this"; however, Addie does not repress the word—she *literalizes* it. Her womb is a "vessel" as empty as Tull's diagram and her virginity has been lost, is it "dead"; but Addie does not need to say "like this"—she does not substitute one

signifier for another, she does not give us another “shape to fill a lack”—instead she gives the concrete representation of a lack. She iconicizes absence.

In Kristevan terms, Addie is in search of the “true-real”; the negation of the signified in favor of the materialized signifier. Indeed, Addie’s narrated consciousness seems to be a case study in the “hallucinatory weft of hysteria”:

In hysterical discourse, truth, when not weighted down by the symptom, often assumes the obsessive, unsayable and emotionally charged weft of *visual representation*. Floating in isolation, this vision of the unnamed real rejects all nomination and any possible narrative [. . .]. This heterogeneous semiotic encounter (sound/vision, pre-object/sign) is a hallucination that marks the insistence of the *true-real*, an archaic and salutary attempt to elaborate the irruption of the real that leaves a hole in the symbolical weft of hysterical discourse. This hallucination recurs periodically, in order to indicate, *like an icon*, an unutterable *jouissance* that endangers the symbolic resources of the speaking being. The hallucinatory icon, which becomes obsessive by virtue of its repetition, challenges what may be structured as a language [. . .]. (“The True-Real” 227, 230; emphasis added)

For the hysteric and the modern artist, the signifier merges with the referent in a “so-called natural language” (“The True-Real” 218) akin to what Kristeva has elsewhere called the “semiotic,” the maternal space that precedes the

establishment of the sign. Addie's sensitivity to "the voiceless speech" of the "dark land" and the surplus of references to "boiling blood," milk, and tears are "metaphors of non-speech, of a 'semiotics' that linguistic communication does not account for [. . .]. They re-establish what is non-verbal and show up the receptacle of a signifying disposition that is closer to the so-called 'primary-processes'" ("Stabat Mater" 174). Addie's denigration of the symbolic, seen not only in her materialization of words, but also in her insistence on concrete "visual representation" (it should be remembered that the novel opens with her watching Cash assemble her coffin—she does not accept his "word" that he will finish it to her specifications) is consistent with the typographical project of the novel.

Indeed, to read Addie's section apart from the rest of the narrative is to overlook the connection between her insistence on the "true-real" and the Faulkner's use of iconicity. Critics like Karen R. Sass who claim that Addie's section is an assertion of her own subjectivity, albeit one she cannot articulate "since love, motherhood, sin, pride, fear—discourse itself—all have been constructed in male terms that exclude her" (10) ignore the fact that language is problematized throughout the novel. Cash is presented by Darl as being incapable of expressing his thoughts ("He looked at me, his eyes fumbling, the words fumbling at what he was trying to say" [*AILD* 132]), Jewel cannot utter the word "coffin," and Addie herself admits that "I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word tricked Anse too" (*AILD* 172), in alignment with the postmodern understanding that all gendered subjects are

inmates in the “prison-house” of language. If Addie’s desire to replace words with icons, to exist within the “true-real,” is understood as symptomatic of the novel, the text comes into sharper focus. Faulkner’s impressionistic (or, as Kauffman terms it, “two-dimensional” [39]) representation of scene and character (Darl describes the barn fire as a “Greek frieze,” [AILED 221], Jewel has “pale eyes set into his wooden face” [AILED 5], Jewel and his horse are “like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun” [AILED 12], Anse’s grieving face looks “carved by a savage caricaturist a monstrous burlesque of all bereavement flowed” [AILED 78], and Addie, on her deathbed, appears to Cash as a “composite picture of all time since he was a child” [AILED 48]) are in fact iconic depictions. Additionally, the other textual gaps—the mimetic spacing in Darl’s first section:

I go on to the house, followed by the Chuck. Chuck. Chuck.
of the adze. (AILD 5)

and the depiction of the cow in Vardaman's final section:

I hear the cow a long time, clopping on the street. Then she comes into the square. She goes across the square, her head down clopping .

She lows. There was nothing in the square before she lowed, but it wasn't empty. Now it is empty after she lowed. She goes on, clopping .

(AILD 251)

both replicate Addie's iconography of silence. Faulkner does not try to repress the unsayable; he does not try to fill the silence with abstract signifiers; his novel

demonstrates and dramatizes Addie's desire for the "true-real," for the "natural language" of the icon.

The Sound and the Fury, although written before *As I Lay Dying*, complicates the notion of typographical iconicity. In the first two sections of the novel, Faulkner presents the consciousnesses of two brothers: one, foreclosed from language entirely, the other, deteriorating into psychosis; in both cases, Faulkner develops unique typographical features which serve to mirror the crisis in signification each experiences. In the last section, Faulkner includes another provocative textual icon—a drawn eye—which, like Addie's coffin, condenses and concretizes the semiotic struggle that suffuses the narrative.

The novel begins within the consciousness of Benjy, a thirty-three-year-old man (led by the Compson family servant's son, Luster) who exhibits the self-absorbed, incommunicable traits of autism, who describes what is later revealed to be golfers "hitting":

Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting [. . .].

"Here, caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away.

"Listen at you, now." Luster said. "Aint you something, thirty-three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you a cake. Hush up that moaning" [. . .].

We went along the fence and came to the garden fence, where our shadows were [. . .]. We came to the broken place and went

through it. "Wait a minute." Luster said. "You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail."

Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said.

(*SF* 3-4 [sic])

Hearing the summons for the "caddie," Benjy is reminded of the loss of his sister, Candace, or, "Caddy." When Benjy gets caught up on a nail as he and Luster crawl under the fence, Benjy (and the reader) is immediately thrust back twenty-eight years to December 23, 1900, when Caddy "uncatches" him from the same nail on their way to deliver their Uncle's letter to Mrs. Patterson (*SF* 3); Benjy cannot discern between signifieds and signifiers, between past and present: he "floats" perpetually between the them. The narrative itself demonstrates Benjy's ambivalent signification process by presenting subjective consciousness with an objective tone: it is only through Luster's commentary that we know Benjy is upset. Bleikasten, in his book *The Most Splendid Failure*, suggests that

There is no central I through whose agency [Benjy's] speech might be ordered and made meaningful; in like manner, there is no sense of identity to make his experience his [. . .]. Benjy's monologue sends us back to the confusions of the pre-subjective, pre-logic, animistic world of infancy. Since there is no distinction between I and non-I, there can be no boundary between inner

and outer space, and nothing to focalize what Benjy does,
perceives, or suffers. (71)

What is remarkable about Benjy's section is that it is a textualization of the pre-symbolic, "animistic" stage—it foregrounds the "the voiceless speech" not only of subjective consciousness, but also of the unrepresentable; "that is closer to the so-called 'primary-processes'" (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 174): what Kristeva calls the "semiotic." In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva distinguishes her conceptualization of the semiotic from the general science of signs (although it is telling that she aligns her term with Peirce's "semeiotic"), and instead defines it as "a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic" (26-7). The semiotic precedes the practice of naming, of designating something as a sign, a symbol that stands for or represents something else. Because Benjy can speak only through moans and cries like an infant, his "speech" is semiotic; he is unable to distinguish between the "I and non-I," and he therefore cannot comprehend the abstract, referential nature of language.

As Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps point out in their article "Much Ado About Nothing: Language and Desire in *The Sound and the Fury*," "because Benjy cannot use language to control his world, naming Caddy does not create her through language; it only makes manifest her absence. Only physical objects associated with Caddy can pacify him" (388); because Benjy cannot speak, because he has not mastered the concept that words serve as

substitutes for what they name, he is not able to master the rift between presence and absence that signification teaches. Benjy is fixated in the pre-linguistic realm where he can only recall Caddy's attempts to bring him to the point of signification; as when she tries to teach him the meaning of the word, "ice": "Look." She broke the top of the water and held a piece of it against my face. "Ice. That means how cold it is" (*SF* 13). Of course, Caddy can hold any number of objects before Benjy—a slipper, a jimson weed, a rutabaga—and he would not be able to pair the abstraction with the object to which it refers. Nevertheless, his sister is Benjy's only hope of learning language, of helping him close the curtain—represented by italics—that separates past from present, presence from absence; when she is gone, he can only "beller" and wait for her to appear.

It is important to note that Benjy's foreclosure from abstract signification is replicated on the level of the text. In a subtle legerdemain, Faulkner makes language alien for the reader as well; we must relearn how to "read" when we approach the novel for the first time. In addition to the text's defamiliarization of language, *The Sound and the Fury* also elevates the signifier to the level of the signified, as it were. The material words themselves are invested with significance beyond mere symbolic meaning; their "strangeness" (underscored by the unconventional punctuation and use of italics) is meant to approximate the realm anterior to abstraction—the world of "concrete operations": the presymbolic semiotic. As Noel Polk suggests in "Trying Not to Say: A Primer on Language in *The Sound and the Fury*," Benjy's "narrative" is not linguistic, but

“completely visual [. . .]. The written language of the Benjy section stands as a direct objective correlative to Benjy’s physical and visual sensations and may best be taken as the direct linguistic counterpart to a primitive painter’s technique” (145). To put it in Peircean terms, his section is primarily iconic. Benjy exists in a realm of objects, not language. Although his thoughts are presented in syntax (albeit rudimentary and ungrammatical), it is clear that this is a narrative approximation of “a ‘semiotics’ that linguistic communication does not account for” (Kristeva, “Stabat Mater” 174).

The textuality—particularly Faulkner’s innovative use of italic type to denote shifts in time and consciousness—positions us within Benjy’s “semiotic” consciousness. As Polk points out, Benjy’s section is “cinematic”; in the text, italics are used to

represent images buried in Benjy’s unconscious which work their way into the front of his conscious life [. . .]. It begins as a dim and fuzzy italic shape in his memory [. . .] then emerges completely into focus as a full-blown scenario in the next paragraph, in roman type, which throughout his section represents what is currently at the front of his mind. (147)

The italicized word retains its denotative, symbolic weight (insofar as no intonational or emphatic dimension added) for the reader, yet the function of the word as an arbitrary sign is undermined in relation to its material significance. Because the type exists as a chronological signifier, independent of the narrative language, the italicizing is indexical: just as smoke indicates fire,

italics indicate time shifts in *The Sound and the Fury*. The importance of Faulkner's indexical experiment is that words are made into visual signifiers; the symbolic relevance of language is concomitant with the materiality of the word. In Faulkner's narrative forest, Saussure's famous "Tree" is not composed of a concept and sound-image but of scaly-barked branchy skeletons—of "actual" (even if approximated and "degenerate") trees—and they all smell like Caddy. To be more specific, the italics are not only symbolic (they are not simply "shapes" or "vessels" to carry meaning), they are iconic (in the same way that Addie's coffin is iconic) *and* indexical. In "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," C. S. Peirce defines the index as a

sign, or representation, which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it, nor because it is associated with general characteristics which that object happens to possess, as because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the sense of memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand [. . .]. But it would be difficult, if not impossible, to instance an absolutely pure index, or to find any sign absolutely devoid of the indexical quality. Psychologically, the action of indices depends upon association by contiguity, and not upon association by resemblance or upon intellectual operations. (12-13)

For Peirce, “anything which focusses the attention is an index. Anything which startles us is an index” (13). Indices do not work linguistically in the conventional sense—they are immediate, sensed: they shift our attention reflexively. Now for the inexperienced reader of Faulkner, the italics may not be entirely indexical (if anything is, as Peirce himself notes); we need to learn the convention before we can slide easily and unthinkingly from past to present when italics are encountered; but within the world of the novel we must come to acknowledge that for Benjy, italics *do* in fact serve as thunderclaps, as a “rap on the door”: when he encounters the nail on the fence his is thrust back, instantly, indexically, to another temporal moment. Arguably, all diacritical marks (indeed, all words) are, at least to some extent, indexical; Faulkner’s italics, however, are meant not merely to modulate meaning (by adding emphasis to a particular word, for example)—they are textual weathervanes of sorts which signal narrative transitions.

Interestingly enough, Faulkner’s innovative use of italic type was, as he saw it, an unsatisfactory bureaucratic compromise: his experiment to privilege the textual materiality of *The Sound and the Fury* was initially even more revolutionary; as he reminded his agent, Ben Wasson, in a letter in 1929, after Wasson had changed all of Faulkner’s italics to roman type:

I think italics are necessary to establish for the reader Benjy’s confusion; that unbroken-surfaced confusion of an idiot which is outwardly a dynamic and logical coherence [. . .]. I wish publishing was advanced enough to use colored ink for such, as I

argued with you [. . .] in the speakeasy that day. But the form in which you now have it is pretty tough. It presents a most dull and poorly articulated picture to my eye [. . .] I think it is rotten, as it is. But if you wont have it so, I'll just have to save the idea until publishing grows up to it [. . .]. (*Selected Letters* 44-45)

Faulkner, who was in the process of publishing a book he had thought too experimental to be publishable, did not feel that he was in a position to demand that his manuscript be printed, at great cost, in various colors. Several years later, Random House proposed a special printing of *The Sound and the Fury* that never materialized; Faulkner wrote to Malcolm Cowley in 1945, inquiring about the manuscript:

About S & F. Someone at Random House has my copy. About 10 years ago we had notion to reprint, using different color [sic] inks to clarify chronology, etc. I underlined my copy in different color crayons [. . .] maybe they can dig it up. (*Selected Letters* 207)

Faulkner's marked copy has never been recovered and there have been no attempts to produce an edition of the novel in anything but standard (black) ink. Bennett Cerf, the founder of Random House mentions the fiasco in his autobiography, *At Random*:

In 1934 we planned and actually announced a special limited edition of *The Sound and the Fury* in which the first section would be printed in different colors to indicate different time

levels. A great deal of effort and negotiation went into the project, but it was finally abandoned when the printer let us down.

Unfortunately, even the copy of the book that Faulkner marked with colored pencils has disappeared. (129)

In addition to revolutionizing printing, Faulkner's colored sections would be the Peircean sign *qua* sign: equal parts symbol ("message"), index (chronological directive), and icon (pictorial representation or "image"). By way of example one might think of the convention of printing the words of Christ in red in the New Testament (a practice introduced soon after Gutenberg); they are meant as directives (indices), but they are also iconic or representational (the blood of salvation). Suggestively, Kristeva speaks of the ritual of transubstantiation (the substitution of bread for the body) as an "indelible thematization of the fold to be found between two spaces"; the merging of the "true-real": the eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic ("The True-Real" 233). Faulkner's typographic experiment—had it been realized—would have enacted a "transubstantiation" of the linguistic sign even moreso than it already does. Faulkner's desire to make the text itself central—to foreground the visual, corporeal, material qualities of language over the abstract, referential, and symbolic is, for Kristeva, the articulation of the semiotic—the modality in which Benjy is trapped.

In "From One Identity to An Other," Kristeva describes the codependent relationship between the semiotic and symbolic modalities:

At the same time instinctual and maternal, semiotic processes prepare the future speaker for entrance into meaning and

signification (the symbolic). But the symbolic (i.e. language as nomination, sign, and syntax) constitutes itself only by breaking with this anteriority [. . .]. Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely a sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed, instinctual element. If it is true that the prohibition of incest constitutes, at the same time, language as communicative code and women as exchange objects in order for a society to be established, *poetic language would be* for its questionable subject [. . .] *the equivalent of incest* [emphasis in original]. (136)

The semiotic is at once the basis of the symbolic, patriarchal culture and the force that threatens its stability. In language, the semiotic is the rhythm that supports the word, the music that carries the meaning. As we have seen with Benjy, failure to repress (or be “repressed out of”) this presyntactic register results in “idiocy” or infantilism; but artists, modernists who explore the workings of signification can be released for a time from the constraints of the symbolic because they have a productive outlet, a “shelter” (Kristeva, “Oscillation” 165). Without the pretense of art, a return to the semiotic (as defiant as incest) can only be experienced as schizophrenia, as psychosis.

Quentin Compson represents a subject placed “on trial” by these opposing forces: struggling between his impulses for the maternal (represented for him, as for his brother, by Caddy) and the oppressive voices of authority. In both text and context, his narrative is an investigation and, ultimately, an inversion of the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic.

That Quentin’s section in the novel begins with his thinking about the abstract concept of time, and his father’s proclamation that “Christ was not crucified: he was worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels” situates Quentin firmly within the symbolic register (*SF* 77). His initial concerns are with “transcendental significations.” According to Lacan, identification with the Father coincides with the acquiescence to the “Law” that simultaneously prohibits the incestuous desire for the mother and encourages the acceptance of the social structure that the Father represents (*Écrits* 65-68). To enter into the symbolic order depends upon the repression of desire. Quentin’s dilemma is that he cannot accept the rigidity of the symbolic order, nor can he return to the dyadic, semiotic stage: instead he oscillates between the two.

Quentin’s sustained meditation on the nature of time is marked by semiotic ruptures, indicated (indexed), as in Benjy’s section, by italics:

If it had been cloudy I could have looked at the window, thinking what he said about idle habits [. . .] The month of brides, the voice that breathed *She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogweed,*

milkweed. I said I have committed incest, Father I said. Roses.

Cunning and serene. (*SF* 77)

Importantly, Quentin's first marked semiotic rupture is paired with his incestuous desire for Caddy, who, in the first section of the novel, requested the maternal responsibility of her neglected brothers. Although Quentin ostensibly desires Caddy less for her sexuality than for the maternal, presymbolic relationship she intimates, that he imagines disclosing his fantasy to his father is evocative; transgression of the Law of the father carries with it the threat of castration—a possibility Quentin considers as a way to repudiate the precepts of the symbolic order—but one which his ineffectual father cannot offer.

Quentin's dilemma is that he sees no way to reconcile the semiotic and symbolic realms: fixed in the thetic phase of individuation, he is in a constant state of flux, unable, like Benjy, to define himself through language. Without the sanctuary of artistic practice, the semiotic can only lead to the asylum, or to death. Indeed, this heterogeneity becomes increasingly threatening for him; when he confronts Caddy's seducer, Dalton Ames, Quentin's consciousness becomes detached: "I heard myself saying Ill give you until sundown to leave town [. . .] my mouth said it I didnt say it at all" (*SF* 159-60 [*sic*]).

In rupturing the boundaries between the *I* and the *not-I*, Quentin reveals his inability to individuate himself, to situate himself in the symbolic order, a problem that culminates in the subversion of Quentin's consciousness:

Just by imagining the clump it seemed to me that I could hear the
whispers secret surges smell the beating of hot blood under wild

unsecret flesh watching against red eyelids the swine untethered
 in pairs rushing coupled into the sea and he we must just stay
 awake and see evil done for a little while its not always and i it
 doesnt have to be even that long for a man of courage and he do
 you consider that courage and i yes sir dont you and he every
 man is the arbiter of his own virtues. (*SF* 176 [*sic*])

In Quentin's imagination, he enters into a dialectic between the symbolic order, represented, significantly, by his father's voice, and the semiotic register that precedes identity and coherence: the semiotic, that which underlies symbolic discourse, becomes increasingly privileged in Quentin's consciousness until his father's sophistic replies are all but drowned out by uncontrolled semiotic rhythms. According to Marsha Warren, his internal struggle is between "ordered thought and language (symbolic discourse)" and the "heterogeneous and the irrational (semiotic discourse)" (100). Quentin's debate with his father

takes the course of an uninterrupted flow of language between the disintegrating symbolic and the disintegrating subject/speaker. Without capitalization or punctuation, the syntax is undelineated by stoppage or closure. *Father* has become *he* and Quentin/*I* has become *i*. The slippage in subject and pronoun positions, too, suggests a kind of dissolving of subjectivity [. . .] there is no exchange, no agreement, only opposition, only conflict between the semiotic and the symbolic,

which ultimately effects Quentin's rejection of the Law/Truth of the Father. (Warren 109)


Indeed, Quentin's entire narrative is illustrative of this polemic between the two poles. Unlike Benjy's semiotic consciousness that necessitates clarification from sequentially more objective narrators, Quentin's section moves from ordered prose into gradually more impulsive, inchoate rushes and rhythms. The italics that signify semiotic ruptures are eventually disposed of, making the boundaries between modalities less defined; indeed, the text deconstructs itself as Quentin's semiotic consciousness becomes privileged. While Quentin dwells upon the night he proposed a suicide pact with Caddy, his narrative prose begins to resemble free verse:

then I was crying her hand touched me again and I was crying
 against her damp blouse then she lying on her back looking past
 my head into the sky I could see a rim of white under her irises I
 opened my knife
 do you remember the day damuddy died when you sat
 down in the water in your drawers
 yes
 I held the point of the knife at her throat
 it wont take but a second just a second then I can do
 mine I can do mine then
 all right can you do yours by yourself
 yes the blades long enough Benjys in bed by now

yes
 it wont take but a second Ill try not to hurt
 all right
 will you close your eyes
 no like this youll have to push it harder
 touch your hand to it. (*SF* 151-52 [*sic*])

As Quentin's loses control of his impulses, he loses control of his syntax; the further he regresses into the semiotic register, the more the symbolic function of the text degenerates: if he cannot commit incest with his sister/mother, he experiences "the equivalent of incest" through a distortion of language; however, the "proetry" here is not released as art; it is surfacing as psychosis—it emerges, not from the pen of an aspiring poet, but from the tortured consciousness of a schizophrenic—and the culmination of this dialectic is Quentin's suicide.

What is remarkable about *The Sound and the Fury* is what it *does*: in privileging the aesthetic and the translinguistic over rudimentary, communicative discourse, the limits of language are tested and the marginalized semiotic is made tantamount with the symbolic; in the intentionally abstruse, rhythmic streams of Benjy and Quentin's consciousnesses, the materiality, rather than the transparency of language is stressed. Indeed, even the final, authoritative section written to order and clarify the preceding semiotic narratives, is marked by one of the most significant semiotic eruptions in the text; in describing an advertisement that Jason sees

after his fight with the old man in the rail car, Faulkner resorts to graphics: “[. . .] grass grew rigidly in a plot bordered with rigid flowers and a sign in electric lights: Keep your  on Mottson, the gap filled by a human eye with an electric pupil” (SF 311). Again, the primacy of language is undermined by the translinguistic semiotic; the very limits of signification are reached. Candace Waid, in her article “The Signifying Eye: Faulkner’s Artists and the Engendering Art,” argues that the spherical eye is linked with castration and the “symbolic association between eyes and female genitals which is already present throughout *The Sound and the Fury*” (241); the most obvious explanation for the icon, in Waid’s reading, is the metonymic connection of eyes with “the minute fragile membrane of [Caddy’s] maidenhead” (qtd. in Waid 241). While Waid’s argument is laudable for being one of the few to directly address the significance of the eye icon (or the “eyecon”), it does not sufficiently account for its typographic presence.

On one level, the eye (which, importantly, is looking to the left—towards the beginning of the narrative) condenses the inability of the Compson brothers to “look ahead,” to forget Caddy (“Candance” incidentally, means as Waid points out, “the one eyed warrior queen” [241]), to accept her absence. As Bleikasten tells us, Caddy

is at once the focal and the vanishing point, the bewitching image around which everything revolves [. . .]. One might even argue that Caddy is little more than a blank counter, an empty signifier, a name in itself devoid of meaning and thus apt to receive any

meaning [. . .]. *Caddy* is a sign, with all the arbitrariness of a sign, and Faulkner's keen awareness of the chancy and shifting relationships between word and thing, language and meaning, is attested on the very first page of the novel by his deliberate punning on *caddie* and *Caddy*. (*Ink of Melancholy* 49-50)

If she is the "focal point," the eye is directed toward her and, hence, is a representation of the desiring gaze of the other characters in the novel; but we might also go further; and If *Caddy* is an empty signifier that exposes the incongruity of the word and the referent, of the "shape" and the "lack," the eye could be a visual signifier for *Caddy* herself. Implicit in the directive to "keep your [eye] on Mottson" is that however much the town might be growing, "if you blink, you'll miss it." In the figure of the eye which blinks, which opens and closes, is the dramatization of fort-da, presence and absence. For Lacan, the eye "is only a metaphor of something that I would prefer to call the seer's 'shoot'—something prior to his eye [. . .], the pre-existence of a gaze (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 72). It is at once object and representamen, a "literal" (or iconic) eye and symbol of desire.

On another level, the eye also suggests Egyptian hieroglyphs (the eye of Horus) and, as such, represents a merging of the signified and signifier; a folding of the iconic (or the semiotic) into the symbolic (effectuated as well by the coffin diagram) which the narrative of *The Sound and the Fury* delineates. Surprisingly, Peirce denigrates the hieroglyph:

In all primitive writing, such as the Egyptian hieroglyphics, there are icons of a non-logical kind, the ideographs. In the earliest form of speech, there probably was a large element of mimicry. But in all languages known, such representations have been replaced by conventional auditory signs. These, however, are such that they can only be explained by icons. ("Logic as Semiotic" 11)

Faulkner himself, in his *Paris Review* interview with Jean Stein, aligns the hieroglyphic with the primitive:

I imagine as long as people will continue to read novels, people will continue to write them, or vice-versa; unless of course the pictorial magazines and comic strips finally atrophy man's capacity to read, and literature really is on its way back to the picture writing in the Neanderthal cave. (137)

However jocular Faulkner's comment might have been, it is important to note that both he and Peirce classify the iconic as a more immediate, more mimetic, and more fundamental "discourse." It follows that the icons within Faulkner's texts serve as reminders of this "archaeology of enunciation" (Kristeva, "The True-Real" 218) that precedes language. In both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner interrogates the Saussurean notion of the arbitrariness of the sign, he restores the archaic semiotic to the level of the symbolic, and he opens our eyes to the transubstantive power of the printed sign.

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